

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **Devising Biblical Drama to Inhabit Proposed Worlds Enabling Ricoeurian Interpretation in Orally Focused Church Communities**

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**Devising Biblical Drama to Inhabit Proposed Worlds:  
a Ricoeurian Analysis of the Interpretation of Scripture through Drama  
in Orally Focused Church Communities**

**by**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD**

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## **Abstract**

“What shows itself is a proposed world, a world I may inhabit,  
and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities.” (Paul Ricoeur)

This research investigates devised biblical drama as an alternative hermeneutic for orally focused churches, whose practical problems in engaging with Scripture leave them at the unintended margins of the global churches’ world of assumed literacy. The work builds on a Ricoeurian perception of Scripture as a dynamic of time, telling and tradition that offers a drawing invitation to Christians to enter and inhabit its proposed worlds of anticipative and participative remembering, beckoning towards life in the now-and-not-yet of the kingdom of God. A telling case is offered by the orally focused Anglican Churches in Gambella (Ethiopia), through the reflective voices of their church leaders, and through the illustration of their dramas: seen within the innovation of fresh interpretation, and also through the sedimentation of their tradition of drama. Firstly, the nature and interpretative process of devising biblical drama is investigated, demonstrating that this holistic, creative, and communal, contextualized approach to Scripture entwines aspects of criticality and orality through its conversational questioning and imagining of Scripture that is enhanced through practical embodiment. The research proposes that the embodied, enacted, mimetic form of drama offers a liminality that enables participative inhabitation of the proposed worlds of Scripture. Secondly, the developing tradition of Anglican biblical dramas in Gambella is investigated. These dramas inherit, form, participate in, and hand on the tradition of Christian cultural memory on which these churches are founded, through a proclamation of Scripture that is made manifest within present event. This research argues that both forms of drama offer participative possibilities for faithful and formative, hopeful inhabitation of the proposed worlds of Scripture, and so could offer potential gifts to the wider church.

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Peter Kuel Lul, Simon Ker Liah, Wilson Okello Akuay.

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### **Figure 0.1 Exploring the Bible through Drama: Research Project Fieldwork Activity**

Monday 12<sup>th</sup> (late afternoon) – Monday 19<sup>th</sup> (lunch-time) December 2011

Anglican Centre, Gambella, Ethiopia

#### **Participants**

9 church leaders (all male):  
Anuak: Darash, Girma, Luk, Wilson  
Nuer: John, Paul, Peter, Simon  
Dinka: Michael (worked with Nuer group)

#### **Focus Group Sessions (and Drama)**

Researcher took role of facilitator/participant-observer. Most sessions followed a format of:  
1) Introduction to topic; 2) Work in ethnic groups (sometimes including preparing of drama);  
3) Whole group sharing and discussion (sometimes including showing of drama)

Monday	a) Welcome and Introduction to Research Project (signing of consent forms) b) Context: Who and Where are we? (ethnic-group discussion leading to drama) c) What is Drama? (unprepared focus-group discussion)
Tuesday	What Drama do you use in your Churches? (Chapter 8)
Wednesday	Drama in Traditional Culture – Led to dramas displaying <i>Traditional Culture</i> , and a sharing of songs with dance
Thursday	Drama used at Christmas and End of the Year, led to sharing of Songs (Chapter 7)
Friday	Drama used during Holy Week and Easter (Chapter 8) Included performance of dramas of <i>The Passion</i> and of <i>The Resurrection</i>
Saturday	Singing of Church Choirs, their use of Scripture and Drama (including sung examples)
Monday	a) Bible-study as practiced in their churches (Chapter 4) b) Influences on devised biblical drama, led to reflective summary by facilitator c) Final reflections: What have I learned this week?

#### **Drama Project**

After introduction of project, researcher's involvement was through direct observation.

What took place each day was decided by the group.

Two sessions concluded with facilitated discussion in focus-group.

Tuesday	Introduction to drama project Choosing drama for performance (Chapter 8)
Wednesday	<i>The Lost Boy</i> : discussion and performance (led to focus-group discussion)
Thursday	Discussion on dramatizing the <i>Temptation of Christ</i> Performance of the <i>Lost Boy</i> (Chapter 9)
Friday	Discussion on dramatizing the <i>Temptation of Christ</i> and the problem of the need for a budget - Researcher eventually drawn into the discussion included dramatization of the <i>Temptation of Christ</i> (Chapter 8)
Saturday	Collecting materials for performance; making the Devil's costume Brief run-through of dramas for Programme
Sunday	Programme: <i>Are you the One?</i> , <i>The Temptations</i> (Chapter 8), <i>The Lost Boy</i> (Chapter 9)

#### **Morning Prayer Drama**

Dramas devised in response to the reading heard at Morning Prayer using two mixed language groups.

All but the first were followed by focus-group discussion.

Wednesday	Luke 7: 18-23 - <i>The Prison; Jesus the Healer</i> (Chapter 4)
Thursday	Luke 7: 24-35 – <i>Pharisees and Tax-collectors; Jesus the Teacher</i> (Chapter 5, 6)
Friday	Luke 7: 18-35 (as one group) – <i>Are you the One?</i>
Monday	Luke 1: 5-25 - <i>Zechariah encounters the Angel Gabriel</i>

## **Figure 0.2 *Exploring the Bible through Drama***

### **Dramas discussed within this research**

#### **Morning Prayer Dramas**

These were freshly devised in two small mixed language groups in response to the Gospel reading at Morning Prayer, at the researcher's instigation:

1. Wednesday: Luke 7: 18-23  
*The Prison, Jesus the Healer* (chapter 4, mentioned chapters 5, 6)
2. Thursday: Luke 7: 24-35  
*Pharisees and Tax-Collectors, Jesus the Teacher* (chapters 5, 6)
3. Friday: Luke 7: 18-35  
*Are You the One?* (mentioned in chapters 4, 5)  
This was devised by the full group, developing the previous dramas, and subsequently performed at the Sunday Programme

#### **Traditional Drama:**

*The Christmas Drama* (chapter 7)

This is performed by each church in the evening of Christmas Eve.  
I have not seen this drama, so use documentary evidence as well as contributions from the fieldwork participants.

#### **A Developing Tradition of Drama:**

Anuak Anglican churches: 'Special Drama'

1. *The Temptation of Christ* (chapter 8)  
Performed at the Sunday Programme
2. *The Lost Boy* (Prodigal Son) (chapter 9, mentioned in chapter 8)  
Performed at the Sunday Programme
3. *The Good Samaritan*: not seen (mentioned briefly in chapter 8)

Nuer Anglican Churches: Liturgical Drama

Holy Week and Easter: discussed, not seen in liturgical format (chapter 8)

## Introduction:

### The Invitation of Scripture to Inhabit Possible Worlds

[Scripture, as a revelatory poetic text] displays a ‘possible world’, a reality in which my human reality can also find itself: and in inviting me into its world, the text breaks open and extends my own possibilities. (Rowan Williams)<sup>1</sup>

And now, in my centre [church] we have, including me, we have four men, no women, who can read. (Wilson Okello Akuay)<sup>2</sup>

The juxtaposition of these quotations, both from within the Anglican Communion, epitomizes the roots of my research, which lies within the field of ‘ordinary biblical hermeneutics’.<sup>3</sup> The first is written by the former Archbishop of Canterbury (2002-2012), Rowan Williams. The other is taken from conversations during fieldwork with Anglican deacons and priests in the Gambella region, in the far west of Ethiopia within the Diocese of Egypt. Archbishop Williams, writing as a scholarly theologian, perceives Scripture as a revelatory text that draws its readers into an imaginative engagement, beckoning them forward into the future through imagining and living expectantly toward worlds of

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 131-147 (p. 133).

<sup>2</sup> Focus group, second Monday, December 2011. For structure of the fieldwork project and details of the dramas, see pp. 9-10. I retain participants’ English (a second or third language) as closely to the spoken form as possible. For additional clarity, I indicate participants by italicizing their names. Having given their permission, each participant is given his full name in the first instance of use in each chapter. Subsequently, I refer to each man by his first name, as used during the fieldwork. For further discussion, see p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> This positioning will be further clarified. See pp. 18-19, and chapter one.

widening possibility.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, *Wilson* offers an insight into his world, where the invitation of Scripture that Williams envisages is severely limited by the very practical problem of illiteracy, so requiring alternative approaches to reading, for accessing and engaging with the text of Scripture.

Together, these quotations attest to a dichotomy between theory and praxis for the Anglican Church, whose membership includes the orally focused, such as those within *Wilson's* church, and the scholar such as Williams, as well as everything in-between. The recent report of the Anglican Communion, *The Bible in the Life of the Church*, is concerned at what it describes as 'gaps' between 'the received wisdom of the church [...] and what actually happens in practice', specifically drawing out one between 'the academy and the pew'.<sup>5</sup> This choice of terminology however, suggests that the report's authors may yet be in danger of forgetting the orally focused, who in church typically sit on benches or even on the ground. It is these Anglicans who form the primary concern of my research.

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<sup>4</sup> With my focus on local churches and their use of Scripture I have presumed a primarily Christian audience and use 'Scripture' to include the confessional relationship between Christians and the two Testaments of the Christian Bible.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter in footnotes as BILC, Report of the Anglican Communion 'Bible in the Life of the Church' Project, *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery*, ACC-15 (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2012), pp. 10-11. Online, including extra material, at Anglican Communion, 'Theology' (The Bible in the Life of the Church Project), *Mission* <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> [accessed 3 December 2015]



Figure 0.3 Sitting on the church benches: Orally focused Anglicans in Gambella<sup>6</sup>

Another quotation from Gambella reaches beyond the contrast to the subject matter of my thesis. *John Gach Dak*, making a bold assertion drawn out of the difficulties of Scripture for the world that he and *Wilson* inhabit, reflects on the possibilities that may be held within drama as a means of approach to Scripture.

Drama is better than the Bible because, though the Bible was written by the Word, for people who did not understand or who did not read we need to win their mind to have a picture of Christ. [...] until people will read, will understand things by themselves and then also will reflect to the picture. Then, the picture is very important. [Drama, as a picture] is something makes things very effective.<sup>7</sup>

Like Williams, *John* uses the imaginative language of possibility, describing drama as a tool for making pictures of Christ to enable reflective engagement. His proposal of the

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<sup>6</sup> Local Assembly, St Luke's Church, Gambella, February 2009, photograph by Janice Proud.

<sup>7</sup> Focus group, first Monday.

‘effective’ nature of such performed pictures suggests drama may offer wider potential for the Church, beyond the compensatory need to reach the non-literate.

These three facets, the invitation of Scripture, my concern at problems of scriptural engagement, and the possibilities of drama form the roots and focus of my research. I develop each of these within this introduction to prepare the ground for the ensuing investigative work of the thesis. The Anglicans of Gambella, within the global church of the Anglican Communion, act as an illustration throughout the thesis to form a telling case, though much of what I write may resonate with other churches, particularly those with a global membership. The following question lies at the heart of the research.

As a tool of biblical engagement what may devised biblical drama offer the interpretative process and its role in Christian formation of both the individual and the local church community, with particular interest in orally focused Anglicans in sub-Saharan Africa?

### **1. Remembering as a Present Beckoning Call toward Future Possibility**

The first strand of my thesis is the invitation of Scripture to engagement with ‘possible worlds’ that may in their turn shape ‘me’ and my own world (Williams).<sup>8</sup> This theoretical and idealistic hermeneutic is derived from and encapsulated in Paul Ricoeur’s own description of the revelatory function of the ‘poetic’: ‘What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost

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<sup>8</sup> Williams ‘Trinity and Revelation’, p. 133

possibilities'.<sup>9</sup> This statement underpins my work and is developed through contextual engagement with Ricoeur's hermeneutical thought to form its primary theoretical framework. Through the interpretative dynamic, the proposed worlds from the past offered by Scripture invite its 'readers', who may in fact be hearers, to imaginatively inhabit the world-of-the-text.<sup>10</sup> In its turn, the encounter acts upon the present world-of-experience of the 'reader', encouraging reflective engagement on the relationship between the two worlds that then offers an invitation to enhanced ways-of-being. In short, Scripture is a foundational text of remembering in hope that beckons 'readers' towards participation in God's work of creating the future.<sup>11</sup>

My perception of the beckoning possibility of Scripture has been nurtured by Phyllis Tribble's close reading of Jeremiah's oracle of 'Rachel weeping for her children' (Jeremiah 31: 15-22).<sup>12</sup> Whilst not directly derivative, Tribble's work led to my imaginative engagement with the passage within which I find a Ricoeurian dynamic play of past,

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102). I engage in depth with Ricoeurian hermeneutical theory in chapter 5.

<sup>10</sup> I place 'reader' in inverted commas to remind myself and my readers that reading is not the only way in which text is encountered. For people who cannot read, their only access to text is through an intermediary means, most obviously through hearing. This inclusive use of 'reader' follows Gerald West and Musa Dube, in 'An Introduction: How we have come to "Read With"', in *"Reading With": An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible: African Overtures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 7-17 (p. 7).

<sup>11</sup> For a theological account of Christianity's basis in eschatological hope, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967). 'Foundational' is used here in accord with Williams, as within 'our *foundational* story', as the telling of God's relational saving activity as the root and heart of the Christian telling of itself, 'Trinity and Revelation', p. 142. This does not accord with the philosophical theory of foundationalism as 'indubitable beliefs' based on the sensed world, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 289.

<sup>12</sup> All biblical quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*, Anglicized Edition (NRSV). Tribble's primary concern is the passage's use of feminine words and imagery, Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), pp. 40-50 (p. 33).



present and future.<sup>13</sup> Opening with an image of the sorrow of Rachel, who ‘refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more’ (verse 15), Jeremiah’s oracle implicitly looks back to the distant past of a specific people. Rachel, as the grieving matriarch of Israel/Judah symbolizes and calls to mind the sorrows of life in Egypt preceding the Exodus. Her despair more directly indicates the near past and present situation of Jeremiah’s own context within the Exile, one that is also in the far past of the contemporary ‘reader’.

The passage turns around the repentance of Rachel’s grandson as a personification of the children of Israel in exile: ‘I was ashamed, and I was dismayed because I bore the disgrace of my youth’ (verse 19). The Lord’s voice of concern offers the promise of hope through his steadfast love for both Rachel: ‘Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; [...] there is hope for your future’ (verses 16-17), and for Ephraim whom he has never stopped loving, for he regards him as his son, in parallel with Rachel’s own motherly concern: ‘Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him’ (verse 20).

Finally, Jeremiah’s voice acts as a beckoning call to the community of Israel to respond to this nurturing love, as it looks to the text’s immediate future, to the end of the Exile and the return to the land to which God had called them: ‘Set up road markers for yourself, make yourself signposts; consider well the highway, the road by which you went. Return, O virgin Israel, return to these your cities. How long will you waver, O faithless daughter?’ (verses 21-22). For today’s ‘reader’ this is an invitation that is also in the past.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, see Ricoeur, ‘Toward Hermeneutic of Revelation’, pp. 98-104.

However, within the picture of the past is also contained a draw to the future in hope, within God's continuing and constantly nurturing love, described by Tribble as a 'womb [that] protects and nourishes but does not possess and control [as] [i]t yields its treasure in order that wholeness and well-being may happen'.<sup>14</sup> This life-affirming image of God also offers an analogy for the nature of Scripture as his nourishing and non-coercive word. Rachel becomes a personification of human motherhood and sorrow, watching and waiting in grief as Ephraim, representing the children of all such mothers, is wayward and repentant by turn. Inter-textual echoes of Rachel's weeping are heard in Matthew's account of the Slaughter of the Innocents, and within the 'text' of world history in the Holocaust, and beyond the people of Israel, in all events displaying the inhumanity of humanity.<sup>15</sup> Within the familial imagery, the passage becomes a universal call to life under the parenthood of God, to confession and absolution in the present as it looks forward to a time that is not-yet but that could-be and that will-be, one where Rachel ceases to weep as her children follow the signposts of the covenantal relationship that is written on their hearts.<sup>16</sup>

As the passage looks forward, it is akin to the paradox of the inaugurated eschatology of the now-and-not-yet of the kingdom of God of the Gospels, where 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand'.<sup>17</sup> Within and beyond the frame of time, God and his kingdom forms a continuing present and presence reaching out of the past and the future, beckoning onward through the time-contained and constrained life of humanity. Looking back to the past leads to reflection in the present and on to a looking forward in the light of what has been seen, as is enshrined in the Anglican Confession that takes a verse from Micah as its beckoning call: '... In your mercy forgive what we have been, help

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<sup>14</sup> Tribble, *God and Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 33

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 2:18.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah 31:33.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 1:14-15; see also Luke 17:20-21.

us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God'.<sup>18</sup>

The authoritative tradition of Scripture is carried within the diversity of its canon and genres, written at different times by different authors, in varying circumstances and for manifold purposes.<sup>19</sup> Holding the sacred and socio-cultural memory, Scripture, forming the norms and values of Christian vocation, ever beckons toward future hope. The temporal dynamic of the revelation of the triune God and his view of the world is at Scripture's centre, presenting him not only as a character, but also as the subject whose living voice can be discerned within its text and within the activity of interpretation, both reminding and drawing 'readers' into his world and kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

## **2. Concern: the Orally Focused Ordinary Christian and Scripture**

This enticing view of Scripture as an invitation to engage in new worlds is tempered by my experience of the world of the ordinary Christian, both within and beyond Gambella. Within Southern Africa, Gerald West and Musa Dube use the term 'ordinary "readers"', in a general sense to denote all those who engage with the Bible pre-critically, and in a more particularized way of those who are 'poor and marginalized'. 'Readers' are so designated, to allow the term to be used metaphorically, as necessary within the context of their work, as with mine in Gambella, where many are, of necessity, hearers of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Ordinary Christians, therefore, using Jeff Astley's definition of ordinary theology, have little or no

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<sup>18</sup> Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 169 (Micah 6:8).

<sup>19</sup> This is not to deny the authority of the stream of Church Tradition that runs alongside and intertwines with the tradition of Scripture.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> West and Dube, 'An Introduction', *Reading With*, p. 7.

scholarly theological and biblical education to help them make sense of Scripture.<sup>22</sup> Following Astley's definition, such Christians are described by Andrew Village as 'ordinary churchgoers', and are pictured by him as well as by the Anglican *Bible in the Life of the Church* report as the people in the 'pew'.<sup>23</sup> Both Village and the report place these ordinary Christians in contrast to the 'academy', while the report envisages those clergy 'who have academic training' as 'stuck uneasily in the middle'.<sup>24</sup> Astley correctly notes the lack of clarity within the distinctions, proposing a 'continuous spectrum' between those who have had no theological education and the theological and biblical scholars within the academy.<sup>25</sup> Pete Ward and Sarah Dunlop, using a wider perception of theological education, note that 'it is hard to imagine any Christian who regularly attends church being untouched by some form of theological education, be it from the pulpit or through the language of the liturgy or indeed through hymnody'.<sup>26</sup> However, despite the continuum linking the ordinary Christian to the scholar and despite the availability of non-scholarly means of theological education, the distinction remains and has effect upon scriptural engagement and Christian formation.

Beyond the issue of theological education for aid in accessing Scripture there is that of reading itself, for within the world Church difficulties of engaging with Scripture are exacerbated by problems of literacy. In my former work with the rural Anglicans of Gambella, I discovered an orally focused world where many are illiterate and where

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<sup>22</sup> Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Village, *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 1; BILC, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Pete Ward and Sarah Dunlop, 'Practical Theology and the Ordinary: Visual Research among Migrant Polish Catholic Young People', *Practical Theology*, 4.3 (2011), 295-313 (p. 297).

speaking and listening remain the primary mode of communication for all.<sup>27</sup> Through these communities I was introduced to issues in accessing Scripture that are the everyday concerns of churches in such contexts, for low levels of literacy are matched by a lack of Bibles in the vernacular for those who can read.

Such issues need to be faced by the Anglican Communion for these problems are not confined to Gambella, with its estimated 10,000 Anglicans.<sup>28</sup> Lack of literacy is a greater problem within, though not confined to sub-Saharan Africa. With an estimated world figure of literate adults at 85%, sub-Saharan Africa's regional figure is 60%, similar to that of the 'low income nations' at 58%.<sup>29</sup> The Anglican Communion is made up of an estimated 85 million Christians within 44 different churches, 38 of which form Provinces. Twelve of these Provinces have churches within sub-Saharan Africa, so forming nearly a third of its primary structural membership.<sup>30</sup> These twelve Provinces have churches in more than two-thirds of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Within sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa has the highest proportion of literate adults, at 94%. Of the thirty nations with literacy statistics below 70%, two-thirds are in sub-Saharan Africa, half having churches within Anglican Provinces. Of the sixteen

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<sup>27</sup> My involvement with the Anglican Church in Ethiopia was as Course Director of their initial theological education scheme, 2006-2009. For further on this relationship, see chapter two.

<sup>28</sup> This figure was given in a talk by the Rt Revd Grant LeMarquand, Bishop of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia, at the Egypt Diocesan Association AGM, 15 June 2016.

<sup>29</sup> All adult literacy statistics are from UNESCO, defined as 'percentage of persons aged 15 and over who can read and write'. Statistics, world and regional: 2013, countries: 2015. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (Data Centre), 'Education' (Literacy – Literacy Rate), *Browse by Theme* (2015) <<http://www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/>> [accessed 2 December 2015]

<sup>30</sup> Anglican Communion, 'Member Churches', *Structures* (2015) <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/memberchurches/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

nations who fall below a bench-mark of 58%, the average figure for 'low income nations', only one is from outside sub-Saharan Africa, six having churches within Anglican Provinces, Gambia (55%), Ethiopia (49%), Sierra Leone (48%), Liberia (47%), South Sudan (32%) and Guinea (30%). For all these nations the figures for youth (aged 15-24) are somewhat higher, while those for women are generally considerably lower, for girls, as in *Wilson's* situation, are less likely than boys to attend school. These statistics indicate that many Anglican Churches within sub-Saharan Africa will of necessity be orally focused.

Though sub-Saharan Africa can be seen to have clear issues regarding literacy, the rest of the world is not immune. The National Literacy Trust in Britain suggests that though less than 1% of its adult population may be classed as completely illiterate, 16% do not have what they term as 'functional literacy', which is measured as above what is expected of the nation's eleven year-old children.<sup>31</sup> The Trust considers that for these people 'reading information from unfamiliar sources or on unfamiliar topics' will be found difficult. The complexity of the language of Scripture may be considered as lying within this category.<sup>32</sup>

The problems of accessing the Bible that I encountered in Gambella acted for me as a spotlight within my growing awareness of wider problems of scriptural engagement among ordinary Christians, and beyond the bounds of the orally focused, for as well as an issue of access to Scripture there is also one of understanding. Bible Society has reported concern at a decline in biblical literacy, indicating that many people find it difficult to

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<sup>31</sup> National Literacy Trust, 'Illiterate Adults in England', *Adult Literacy* (2015) <<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/adult-literacy/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>32</sup> See also Village, *Bible and Lay People*, pp. 52-53.

relate Scripture to their Christian lives.<sup>33</sup> Seeking to ‘offer the Bible to the world’, Bible Society in its mission statement expresses its concern to make Scripture ‘available, accessible and credible’.<sup>34</sup> Where it does not meet any of these three criteria, Scripture may offer a resounding silence rather than beckoning worlds of possibility. When engaging with Scripture is problematic, the discipleship of the ordinary Christian has to be built upon the *bricolage* of what is readily available from the worship, practice and experience of their faith, rather than on direct response to Scripture.<sup>35</sup> Though Scripture’s revealed worlds of possibility may be offered, unless they are accessed, seen or heard, and imagined they must also be silent and unrevealed, for even if listened to, if the word makes no connection with the listener it cannot make a sense that can be engaged with, explored and appropriated.

In accord with the Reformation concern for the use of the vernacular to provide access for the ordinary Christian to liturgy and Scripture, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer argued that due to the use of Latin, ‘they have heard with their ears only, and their heart, spirit, and mind, have not been edified thereby’.<sup>36</sup> He sought words that could be understood and an engagement that reached the whole person. In Cranmer’s Collect for what became known as Bible Sunday, the Anglican Church has prayed and continues to

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<sup>33</sup> Leaflet advertising Bible Society course, *h+*, *Making Good Sense of the Bible: 10 Steps to help your church do Bible better* (2013), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Bible Society, ‘What we do’, *About Bible Society* <<http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/what-we-do/>> [accessed 17 July 2015]

<sup>35</sup> Ward and Dunlop, ‘Practical Theology and the Ordinary’, p. 312. See also Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 4, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Cranmer (developing Matthew 22:37, Deuteronomy 6:5), initially ‘Preface’ in the Prayer Books of Edward VI (1549, 1552), retained thereafter as ‘Concerning the Service of the Church’, *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. viii.

pray that its' members may 'inwardly digest' Scripture.<sup>37</sup> Cranmer's imagery and call recognises the need for holistic engagement. My thesis is founded on such a desire for scriptural engagement that edifies the heart, spirit and mind of the whole person, irrespective of their literacy or non-literacy. I began with the seeming unbridgeable gap between Archbishop Williams' hermeneutical theory and the practical difficulties of *Wilson's* orally focused actuality. I write in response to an answering intuition of possibility, that the activity of devising drama to re-tell a passage of Scripture could offer an alternative and holistic communal pathway into scriptural engagement that is not primarily based on the ways of literacy.

### **3. Possibility: Drama as a Tool of Scriptural Interpretation**

I move from concern to the intuition of possibility by returning to Tribble and my response to her close reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 as 'a drama of voices'.<sup>38</sup> She displays each: Rachel 'weeping for her children', the turning of Ephraim in repentance, the Lord responding to each, and finally Jeremiah's imperative to the exiled to return. As I re-read Jeremiah these characters stepped from the page, my imagination dwelling on each as they spoke. Tribble had transformed my reading of this biblical text through her careful unfolding of the different 'voices'. My own responding imagination added action and spatial relationships between the different characters. The text became an imagined physical drama inside my head:

Rachel lay on the ground, bereft and weeping. The Lord, as a nurturing parent came to her and raised her up. She clung to him, but could not be consoled. They both

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<sup>37</sup> A Collect is a 'gathering' prayer. Collect for Second Sunday in Advent, 1549 and all subsequent editions, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 49; retained as Collect for Last Sunday of Trinity, in Church of England, *Common Worship, Services*, p. 494.

<sup>38</sup> Tribble, *God and Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 40.



turned and looked toward Ephraim in the far distance. Remaining where he was, Ephraim twisted and turned, looking away and toward the Lord, before dropping to the floor within his own grief of repentance, mirroring Rachel's former position of lamentation. In response, the Lord, taking Rachel with him began to move toward Ephraim, with arms that were open to beckon and receive their 'son'. From beyond the scene, Jeremiah's own voice broke in calling on me not only to join with both Rachel and Ephraim in grief and confession, but to respond to the Lord's present beckoning call.

My imagined drama looked backwards to Rachel, but more immediately forwards beyond the Exile and Return, both to its general and to its more personal implications and hope for the present. The reality of the history was re-described within a prophetic dramatized narrative that offered possibilities of alternative ways of being-in-the-world.

Trible's account, as a scholarly text is unlikely to be read by the ordinary Christian. Yet, as I re-read both her text and Jeremiah, I noticed that apart from the extra nuance offered by an understanding of the Hebrew feminine imagery, what Trible had actually done was sensitively and meticulously to open up what could be there for all to see, if only the biblical text was read in such a careful way displaying its voices, action and relationships. Reflecting on why this particular passage had remained silent for me until I read it with the aid of Trible's perspective, I realised that I had never before read it with such attention to the detail of the text. It was only through this slowed-down reading process that I happened to make with Trible that the passage was able to speak to me. It had primarily engaged with my imagination for I *saw* and *experienced* the textual picture-in-words before I thought about it.

For me a fresh narrative emerged, providing impetus for my own research from the juxtaposition of Jeremiah's oracle, Tribble's scholarly text, my responding imagination, and my subsequent reflection. Beyond her own exegetical intentions, Tribble's text came to me as a call for the enfranchisement of the ordinary 'reader' of Scripture, for I (or a more ordinary, less theologically trained 'reader') could have 'read' and discovered Jeremiah's message for myself, had I but taken the care to make a slow, careful 'reading' that allowed the words of the text to be unfolded so that my imagination could see what it was saying. Perhaps the passage might have reached me in such a fashion if I had encountered it through the devotional interpretative methods of Ignatian imaginative contemplation or *Lectio Divina*.<sup>39</sup> Yet, and herein lies my moment of intuition, the drama of my imagination could perhaps have spoken more clearly if it had been played out in the reality of physical space with human actors and movement.

My hermeneutical reflections continued. Tribble had accompanied me on my reading of the passage. Perhaps, 'reading' with others would reveal yet more nuances and possibilities within the text than I could see on my own. Perhaps, devised drama rather than my imagined one could form an alternative hermeneutic, as a method of interpretation that need not be reliant on academic scholarship, and need not even be reliant on everyone having the ability to read, but that could be open to all, requiring just one text and one reader who is willing to read aloud to others. Perhaps, devised biblical drama could form a communal 'reading', through a conversational and practical, physical unfolding and framing of what is there within the text, as an imagined and embodied re-telling of the

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<sup>39</sup> For brief introduction to Ignatian contemplation and *Lectio Divina*, see Gerard W. Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), pp. 46-53.

word that would allow the text to speak for itself experientially, within the centre of a community for whom it is perceived as Scripture.

As an embodied and creative medium, such drama would demand an imaginative approach to Scripture, as it seeks to physically display the text within the reality of the present context. In so doing, Scripture would be brought through its re-presentation into the midst of the here-and-now of reality, as an act of performed theology made by the devisers/performers, and that could be offered to an audience. In its physical presence, drama can be seen as a means through which the local Christian community is literally invited into the world-of-the-drama, so that Scripture may break open and extend their own individual and communal possibilities.

#### **4. The Structure of the Thesis: Chapter Synopses**

The roots of this thesis lie in the contrasting juxtaposition between the possibilities of Scripture and my concern at the problems experienced by many Christians in engaging with the text, particularly for those from orally focused communities within sub-Saharan Africa. The focus of the thesis is on what has developed out of this juxtaposition: my perception of the possibilities of devised drama as offering alternative ways of engagement with the proposed worlds, that Williams describes as the enabling ‘invitation’ of Scripture. The study is written in three sections. The first section lays out the methodology and methods of the work and develops the context of the research within orally focused Anglican churches in sub-Saharan Africa. The second section develops a hermeneutic of devised biblical drama through bringing Ricoeurian hermeneutical theory into conversation with the process of devising and makes an investigation of the specific contribution of the nature of drama to scriptural engagement. Freshly devised dramas and focus group

conversation from Gambella are used as an illustrative focus. The third section investigates the present practice of biblical drama in Gambella where, rather than using devising as a means of making fresh interpretation, its developing tradition of repeated dramas offers another form of participation in Scripture. The Conclusion draws the threads of the study together to consider the potential of devised drama for orally focused churches - and beyond.

## **Part One: Concern and Possibility, Methodology and Context**

### **Chapter One: Charting the Conversation within Ordinary Biblical**

**Hermeneutics** forms the methodological basis for the research within a conversational framework that, though concerned with ordinary Christians in orally focused communities, remains rooted in the area of biblical hermeneutics. I discuss theological interpretation's concern for faithful reading of the Bible as Scripture, the crucial role of Ricoeurian hermeneutical theory for my research, and the emerging field of biblical performance criticism's use of drama, theatre and performance theory. From the wider theological field, I introduce practical theology and its use of qualitative research methods.

**Chapter Two: Contexts in Relationship** continues the methodological discussion by turning to the context of the research. I introduce the Anglicans of Gambella who form the illustration for this research, before offering a reflexive account of my own personal archaeology lying behind the study. The second half of the chapter focuses on the fieldwork that is at the heart of the research.

**Chapter Three: Participating Together in the Dialogue of Scripture** provides the roots of the study, placing the orally focused context of Gambella within its wider

context of the Anglican Communion and its current *Bible in the Life of the Church* project. This project, investigating how Anglicans engage with Scripture sought to reach the ‘grass roots’, and is concerned for the insights of biblical scholarship to enrich the lives of ordinary Christians of whom the orally focused appear to form a forgotten margin. In response to the project’s parallel concern for ‘sharing’ within the Communion’s ‘unity in diversity’, I propose that devised biblical drama offers an alternative hermeneutic that is particularly appropriate within orally focused communities such as Gambella, and could have its own gifts to offer to enrich the life of the wider church.

#### **Chapter Four: A Braided Approach of Orality, Literacy and Embodiment**

forms the literature review, placing the investigation of devised biblical drama within the scholarly context of Sub-Saharan African theology and biblical studies’ concern with orally focused Christians. This offers accounts of differences between critical literacy and orality, which I develop to suggest drama’s embodiment as a third approach, entwining with strands of both literacy and orality. I also provide an over-view of the limited material available on devised biblical drama within sub-Saharan Africa, particularly focusing on Musimbi Kanyoro’s account of a ‘festival of Ruth’.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Part Two: Toward a Hermeneutic of Devised Biblical Drama**

**Chapter Five: Creating Possibility through Memory’s Beckoning Call** provides the Ricoeurian hermeneutical framework for the study that I suggest is particularly appropriate in its concern with possibility. Through Ricoeur, Scripture is perceived as a dynamic telling, bringing past and future into present encounter. Such ‘telling’, as creative and productive mimetic interpretation leads beyond itself into proposed worlds of

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<sup>40</sup> Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

possibility. Bringing the Gambella church leaders account of Bible study in comparison with their approach to drama into dialogue with Ricoeur and a range of scholars of biblical hermeneutics enables reflection on Scripture as authoritative/foundational and normative/formative revelation.

**Chapter Six, Making Sense through Devising Biblical Drama** forms an investigation of the process of interpretation taking place within devised biblical drama. Through a Ricoeurian hermeneutical arc and incorporating aspects of Patrice Pavis' interpretative schema for analysing theatre I investigate the dialogical relationship between the world-of-the-text and the world-in-front-of-the-text that builds the interpretation that forms a drama.

**Chapter Seven: 'Something seem to be different'** introduces drama, theatre and performance theory to investigate what the distinctive character of devised biblical drama has to add to the interpretative process, drawing on what had emerged within the previous chapter. I engage with a range of scholars to develop my account of a hermeneutic of devised biblical drama through investigating the process of collaborative and creative activity, the nature of drama as displayed mimetic enactment, the effect of its liminal quality, and its playful characteristic of blending seriousness and fun together.

### **Part Three: Gambella: Developing a Tradition of Biblical Drama**

Having developed a theoretical hermeneutic of devised biblical drama through conversation with the church leaders of Gambella and through the illustration of their devised drama, I turn to the developing practice of biblical drama within their churches to broaden the investigation.

**Chapter Eight: Showing and Telling the Christmas Drama**, uses Bernard Beckerman's account of performance working within a tension between the showing of an iconic mode and the telling of a dialectical mode to investigate the Christmas dramas of Gambella that are at the heart of their tradition of drama, particularly focusing on their comic portrayal of 'Herod and the Slaughter of the Innocents'.

**Chapter Nine: Fossils or Living Stones?** Having considered devised drama and its fresh interpretation of Scripture and also the Christmas drama that acts as an important carrier of Christianity's cultural memory within Gambella, this chapter uses a Ricoeurian account of tradition existing in a dynamic of sedimentation and innovation to investigate the present practice of biblical drama in Gambella and its draw toward forming a developed tradition rather than developing a tool for making fresh interpretation.

Running through the accounts of biblical drama is the perception of the Church leaders of Gambella that drama brings the narrative of Scripture out of the past into the present. **Chapter Ten: Proclamation as Manifestation**, uses Ricoeur in conversation with Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* to investigate the nature of biblical drama as both proclamation of the Gospel and through its mimetic embodiment as a manifestation that invites a participation in its proposed world that may perhaps be seen as a sacramental draw to the future.

The **Conclusion** draws together the threads of the thesis to propose that innovative devised drama as a tool of scriptural interpretation and the participative nature of Gambella's developing sedimentary tradition of 'special' and liturgical drama, together

offer an enabling tool of biblical engagement, particularly suited to orally focused communities and which could also be a gift for the wider Church.





## **Part One**

### **Concern and Possibility: Context and Methodology**



## Chapter One

### Charting the Conversation within Ordinary Biblical Hermeneutics:

#### Theory and Practice, Methodology and Method

*Mary* is coming here to learn from us, and to show this understanding to the people in her university; to read our mind they have to read our understanding.

(*John Gach Dak*)<sup>1</sup>

My investigation of devised biblical drama could have remained within the realms of my own theoretical and imaginative vision if I had not had the opportunity to work with the orally focused Anglican churches of Gambella. *John*, as a participant in my fieldwork voiced the reality of the situation that what he and the rest of the group of participants had to share with me was of vital importance to this investigative process. He understood that his thoughts and reflections had value beyond his own immediate context, as part of the wider conversation of this investigation.<sup>2</sup> My methodology, therefore, springs from a perception of this investigation as one of charting a path through a conversation of multiple voices, seeking interplay of the practical and theoretical, the local and the general, and of the hermeneutical, theological, and theatrical that together build the dialogue of the research, that yet remains under the broad umbrella of biblical hermeneutics. I open the chapter with a theological consideration of my conversational methodology that is built

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<sup>1</sup> Drama Project, Tuesday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro writes from a similar perspective of listening to those whom 'scholars would rarely consult', *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 41; see also, pp. 11, 92.

upon the contextual theologian, Stephen Bevans' account of 'synthetic contextual theology',<sup>3</sup>

I then turn to the field of biblical hermeneutics, where scholarly methodology and method need to be appropriately chosen to answer my research question:

As a tool of biblical engagement what may devised biblical drama offer the interpretative process and its role in Christian formation of both the individual and the local church community, with particular interest in orally focused Anglicans in sub-Saharan Africa?

My concern is with biblical engagement, as both an interpretative process of ordinary Christians, and with its role in their formation. Firstly, I consider the developing field of ordinary biblical hermeneutics, in sub-Saharan Africa as well as within my own British context, for it is within these conversations that this work offers its voice. This leads me to other primary hermeneutical conversation partners. Concern with the confessional interpretation of the ordinary Christian steers me to the theological interpretation of scholarship, and thence to my own hermeneutical approach through Paul Ricoeur. The other scholarly strand of my investigation is through drama, theatre and performance theory, and this conversation is made in company with the emergent field of biblical performance criticism. Finally, my focus on ordinary Christians within biblical hermeneutics leads me to practical theology's concern for investigating reality through the specificity of telling cases, and so toward the contextual work of the next chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. edn (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), pp. 88-102.

## 1.1 Conversational Contextual Methodology

Arguing for the inherently contextual nature of theology, Bevans outlines six ‘models of operation’ by which theology relates with the cultural world, each encapsulating differing theological approaches and presuppositions.<sup>4</sup> His ‘synthetic’ model, as its name implies is one of the ‘drawing together’ that accords with my desire for open conversation.

This conversational model corresponds with Bevans’ description of an affirming ‘creation-centred orientation’, where ‘grace builds on nature’, and is in sympathy with the theological outlook I brought to this study.<sup>5</sup> With its essence in dialogue, the model is rooted in a perception of the triune God as community, and as seeking community with and within his creation.<sup>6</sup> Following from this, the Incarnation forms the decisive and particular expression of the nature of God that is also expressed more generally within the sacramentality of creation; ‘charged with the grandeur of God’, it forms a sign of divine blessing and grace.<sup>7</sup> Within and through his creation God has revealed, is presently revealing, and will continue to reveal his God-self. In Bevans’ words, he is ‘operative in all cultures, and uncircumscribable in every way’.<sup>8</sup> Within the terms of this thesis, and in accord with my own theological perspective, revelation through the sacramentality of the material world within embodied biblical interpretation, may offer its beckoning call, as

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<sup>4</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. For his account of contextual theology and for his models, see p.p. 12-15, 28-33. These bear some resemblance to H. Richard Niebuhr’s models in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Bevans, pp. 21, 88-102.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid (quoting Gerard Manley Hopkins), pp. 12-13, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 91, 13-14.

within the specificity of the revelation of Scripture, both drawing humanity toward living together within the kingdom of God, '*on earth as it is in heaven*'.<sup>9</sup>

This affirmational 'creation-centred orientation' is contrasted by Bevans with a 'dialectical imagination', that perceiving human culture and experience in need of radical conversion, leads to a 'redemption-centred orientation', where instead of growing upon nature, 'grace replaces nature'.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as with all models, the differentiation is too stark, for despite the essential goodness of creation, humanity ever remains in need of the healing of redemption. However, I suggest that conversation as a dialogue, rather than as a more forceful and confrontational dialectic, seeks to discover what each participant has to offer, in order to develop *together* a truer and in theological terms more God-oriented approach, that all may grow toward a fuller humanity with and within the God who can never be fully explained or appreciated.<sup>11</sup> Following Bevans' model, my work offers an optimistic and affirming perception of the nature of humanity within creation, lying within God's providence which was, is and will be ultimately drawn toward Him, in response to the triune God's beckoning towards worlds-of-possibility, as envisaged within Ricoeurian hermeneutics. Such a viewpoint accords with Augustine's perception that, 'our hearts find no peace until they find their rest in you [God]', and also with Ignatius of Loyola's proclamation that 'the [...] things on the face of the earth are created for us to help us in attaining the end for which we are created'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 6:10.

<sup>10</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-91, 94.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), I.1 (p. 21); Ignatius of Loyola, quoted in Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Finding God in all Things: the Way of Saint Ignatius*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 17.

As part of its dialogical nature this model seeks inclusivity of theological practitioners, of ordinary Christians as well as professional biblical scholars and theologians, and of those from outside the community as well as those from within.<sup>13</sup> Bevans summarizes his model with an image of plants that ‘need and value cross-pollination so that new and sturdier plants may be developed’.<sup>14</sup> Extending the metaphor, I suggest that the roots of this plant may be seen as nurtured from the *tradition* that has been inherited from the *past*, providing its *values* and *norms* as evidenced within the *present* plant, that may yet be further nurtured from what lies within its environmental *context*. A plant is drawn to grow towards the light, towards the *possibilities* and *ideals* of a *future* what-might-be.

Unmediated by the reality of what-is, these norms and ideals could become the distanced and unattainable prescriptive of what-should-be, for they need to be earthed by the particular situational reality of the present. Meredith McGuire helpfully emphasises the ‘ever-changing, multi-faceted, often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices’ that form our ‘lived religion’ without necessarily according with what our ‘religious institutions consider important’.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, without the norms, values and wisdom of tradition as they are projected into the ideals of the future, transformational possibilities cannot be brought to bear upon the holistic messiness of the present. My research is interested in people as they actually are as well as in possibilities of what could be, and for this reason, the orally focused Anglicans of Gambella, and their biblical

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<sup>13</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 91-92. For this same inclusivity, see Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), pp. 16-20.

<sup>14</sup> Bevans, pp. 92-93.

<sup>15</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4; also see Pete Ward and Sarah Dunlop, ‘Practical Theology and the Ordinary: Visual Research among Migrant Polish Catholic Young People’, *Practical Theology*, 4.3 (2011), 295-313. From a rural Kenyan viewpoint, see Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*.



dramas, form the particular illustrative situation that is brought into dialogue with my more theoretical considerations, in my search for alternative means of biblical engagement as a practical possibility for a living church.

The devised biblical dramas of Gambella will be influenced by the whole of life, rather than the stimulus of the scriptural narrative alone. Pete Ward's insistence that the church is simultaneously theological and social/cultural is in line with Bevans' account of contextual theology, and like that is grounded on integrative Christological principles of Christ, not only as head of the Church, but crucially in whom '*all* things hold together'.<sup>16</sup> The nature of Incarnation is of God's engaged concern for the world as-it-is, in its very embodied-ness and messy particularity. This Christological viewpoint provides the rationale for the all-embracing and situated nature of my research within the everyday realities of ordinary biblical hermeneutics, for it suggests that working within the dynamic, relationships drawn between Church, God and the world is less a matter of choice, than a Christian view of the ontological nature of how things actually are: the Church (as it is here on earth) lies within and as part of the messiness of the world, all within the provenance and providence of the triune God. Ordinary Christians worship God and 'read' Scripture in the midst of the messiness and *bricolage* of their everyday lives.

## 1.2 Ordinary Biblical Hermeneutics

'The often unruly, real reader is not usually welcome in the corridors of the academy among critical readers of the Bible', so wrote Gerald West and Musa Dube, in 1996, in their introduction to *Reading With*, a Semeia book of essays from sub-Saharan Africa, on

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<sup>16</sup> Colossians 1:17-18, quoted by Pete Ward, ed., 'Introduction', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 1-10 (p. 2).

‘the interface between critical and ordinary readings of the Bible’.<sup>17</sup> By 2007, when West edited the companion volume, *Reading Other-wise*, he commented on the first volume that, ‘though we saw ourselves as contributing to a common project – biblical scholarship, in broad terms – we were perceived by some “at the centre” to be on the periphery, on the margins.’ He considered that much had changed in the intervening eleven years that made this second volume more welcome and less on the margins, as displayed within its contributions from many other parts of the world, including the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> Yet, from within the United Kingdom, in the same year, Andrew Village was still able to write, ‘the academy, for all its sophisticated developments in the last fifty years, remains largely ignorant of what other [ordinary] people do with the Bible’.<sup>19</sup> Nine years later, Andrew Rogers is still calling attention to this deficit, ‘Given the turn to context, and the huge literature on academic biblical hermeneutics, it is surprising how long it has taken the academy to pay attention to the biblical hermeneutics of ordinary Christians.’<sup>20</sup> Hans de Wit, whose global project on inter-cultural interpretation focused on ordinary ‘readers’, describes this as ‘one of the biggest embarrassments and gaps in modern biblical scholarship’, and outlines how this has been more amply addressed in the Southern hemisphere than in the West.<sup>21</sup> My research fits within this trend, for though written in

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<sup>17</sup> Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, eds., ‘An Introduction: How We Have Come to “Read with”, “*Reading With*”: *African Overtures*, Semeia 73 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 7-17 (p. 7).

<sup>18</sup> Gerald O. West, ed., ‘Introduction’, *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, Semeia 62 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 1-5.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Village, *The Bible and Lay People: an Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew P. Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics: How Do We Read?* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Hans de Wit, ‘Through the eyes of another: Objectives and Background’, in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Amsterdam: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004), pp. 3-53 (p. 10). For examples, see many of the essays in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, first

England, I have a global concern for the life of the Anglican Communion, and it is centred on the difficulties of biblical engagement for orally-focused church communities, more prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, than in the West.<sup>22</sup>

Situating this inter-disciplinary research within the field of biblical hermeneutics has not been straightforward, for within my context of writing in the United Kingdom, the gradually growing scholarship on ordinary biblical hermeneutics is generally self-placed within the field of practical theology, and my own work's concern with biblical engagement follows in their wake, notwithstanding my particular concern with orally focused churches.<sup>23</sup> Contextually based interpretations of Scripture within the United Kingdom, such as Louise Lawrence's *The Word in Place*, remain situated within biblical studies, though such work with ordinary readers still remains relatively uncommon.<sup>24</sup> Yet, though I include interpretations of specific texts made through devised drama, my focus of interest remains on the process and what is happening within that process, rather than on the textual interpretation itself. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, and throughout the

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pub. 1991 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006); Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, eds., *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Use of global terms such as 'sub-Saharan Africa' and 'West' is fraught with difficulty. They remain useful broad brush-stroke descriptors, but I use them sparingly, aware that there will always be exceptions to whatever is stated. I only use the word 'African' within quotations.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, see Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, p. 4; Village, *Bible and Lay People*, p. 2; Andrew John Todd, 'The Talk, Dynamics and Theological Practice of Bible-study Groups: A Qualitative Empirical Investigation' (doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2009), p. 12, available at Online Research at Cardiff. <<http://orca.cf.ac.uk/id/eprint/29139>> [accessed 31 May 2016]

<sup>24</sup> Louise J. Lawrence, *The Word in Place: Reading the New Testament in Contemporary Contexts* (London: SPCK, 2009). See also, Janet Lees, 'Remembering the Bible as a Critical "Pedagogy of the Oppressed"', in *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, ed. by Gerald O. West (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 73-86.

Southern hemisphere, such work, is not only far more prevalent, but also remains within biblical hermeneutics itself.<sup>25</sup>

Writing from within post-apartheid South Africa, West writes that, ‘while there are very real difficulties of access to the tools of biblical scholarship in its Western forms, this very disadvantage may have saved African biblical scholarship from the temptation of severing itself from its primary dialogue partner – ordinary African believers who interpret the Bible in their daily struggles for survival, liberation and life’.<sup>26</sup> While the ordinary ‘reader’ has become increasingly a focus of contextual biblical hermeneutics from ideological perspectives such as liberation and post-colonialism more prevalent in the South, in the West interest in the reader has largely remained centred on implied rather than real ‘readers’, even within theological interpretation’s concern with the interpretation of the Church (see below, p.45).<sup>27</sup>

Despite my own British context, I situate this research primarily within biblical hermeneutics, according more closely with its concern with the orally focused world of sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, my concerns remain primarily hermeneutic, as I seek to answer the question of what happens when Scripture is interpreted using devised biblical

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<sup>25</sup> For instance, see many of the essays in Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin*; West and Dube, *The Bible in Africa*.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald O. West, ‘Mapping African Biblical Interpretation: A Tentative Sketch’, in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 29-53 (p. 39).

<sup>27</sup> Justin S. Ukpong charts the development of scriptural interpretation in sub-Saharan Africa as a development toward their present concern with ordinary readers (since the 1990s), from the concern with inculturation and liberation that had held sway from the 1970s, ‘Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions’, in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 11-28 (p. 12). John Barton charts the movement of biblical scholarship towards concern with the implied reader, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996), pp. 198-236.

drama as a medium, and in my use of the hermeneutical philosopher, Paul Ricoeur as a primary conversation partner in my task (see below, p. 49). Yet, while my concern is related to ordinary ‘readers’ and their spiritual formation within a church setting, the research is necessarily also within the horizon of ecclesiology, spirituality, and theology, as is commonly found within the concerns of practical theology (see below, p. 62). Scholarly boundaries, especially within the theological family of academic disciplines are difficult to segregate completely.

The concern of Contextual Bible Study, where biblical scholars ‘read with’ ordinary Bible ‘readers’, is often portrayed as a matter of liberation for the ordinary ‘reader’. Gerald West writes of offering the ‘structured and systematic’ tools of the trained biblical scholar to enable the critical engagement of the ‘poor and marginalized’ in their theological reflection that leads to praxis as ‘community based action’.<sup>28</sup> My own concern is also one of liberating enablement of biblical interpretation and engagement, though broader in its view of liberation. However, I suggest that devised drama, as an interpretative tool, is not reliant on the engagement of the biblical scholar, but rather is within the reach of any orally focused church community, as will be discussed in chapters three and four.

West views his own hermeneutical reflections on what has taken place as ‘second-order reflection on practice’, though at the same time contends that he is also ‘partially constituted’ by his involvement with ordinary ‘readers’.<sup>29</sup> Hans de Wit and his fellow scholars’ inter-cultural work has a more global concern, and they argue that that they are ‘convinced of the wealth of Bible reading practices of ordinary readers’, adding that this is

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<sup>28</sup> West, ‘Introduction’, *Reading Other-wise*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

‘a neglected terrain that offers tremendous opportunities’, and that the ‘exclusion’ of their readings from the academy means its ‘impoverishment’.<sup>30</sup> Within this project, though I have included scriptural interpretation made through drama in Gambella, that may offer fresh insights into specific texts, more importantly for the purposes of this work, I have fore-grounded the reflections of my fieldwork participants on the activity of devised biblical drama as a primary conversation partner in the research, in order to offer the insights of these church leaders into the hermeneutical task itself.

### 1.3 Theological Interpretation

This research is primarily concerned with the confessional interpretation of ordinary readers within local churches. Such confessional interpretation, when undertaken within the scholarly world of biblical studies and hermeneutics, is described as *theological interpretation*.<sup>31</sup> For scholars, and ordinary Christians, this term speaks of the import to their interpretation of their beliefs, attitude and approach to the diverse set of writings that form Christian Scripture, symbolized for Anglicans within their liturgical responses to the reading of the Bible: ‘This is the word of the Lord’, ‘This is the Gospel of the Lord’.<sup>32</sup> With these words, Scripture is proclaimed by the Anglican Church as good news and inspired, carrying direct relationship to the triune God. The canon of the Church’s authoritative set of writings, holding the memory of what lies at its foundation, shapes its identity, beliefs and way of life, so forming the basis from which any biblical interpretation is made.

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<sup>30</sup> de Wit, *Through the Eyes of Another*, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance, Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998); Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); A.K.M. Adam, and others, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 172.

The Bible is made up of many differing writings, of different genres and times, building together to form a complex collection of what as a unity, coming from the hands of countless human authors, often argues and contradicts with itself. This diversity of message is described by the Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, as ‘testimony and counter-testimony’.<sup>33</sup> Despite its quantity, variety, and ambiguity, theological interpretation, and the Church, insist that Scripture does form some sort of coherent whole, as the divinely inspired story of God’s purposes within his relationships with the world that he created, judges and liberates, and within which the same concerns and ‘major historical landmarks’ of Exodus and Christ’s Passion and Resurrection are continually highlighted, remembered and reflected upon.<sup>34</sup> The New Testament scholar, Richard Bauckham describes Scripture as a ‘nonmodern metanarrative’ that makes a ‘noncoercive claim to truth’.<sup>35</sup> Narrative is only one of its many genres, but held together, Scripture’s many and competing voices tell one story, which Christianity insists is of universal and ultimate import, and that looks forward in hope to what is to come, at the same time as it remembers what has been.

With its sense of time that sweeps from creation to the eschaton, Scripture lacks closure, with present day readers forming a part of its on-going story. For Christians, this is not ‘their story’, but ‘our story’, for the Church is the community who are the heirs of these authoritative and normative documents. The Church is the community who has been, and

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<sup>33</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> The Scripture Project, ‘Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture’, pp. 1-5 (p. 1); Richard Bauckham, ‘Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story’, pp. 38-53 (pp. 38, 42); Robert W. Jenson, ‘Scripture’s Authority in the Church’ pp. 27-37 (p. 29); all from Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Bauckham, pp. 43, 53.

continues to be formed by Scripture, as a primary part of the chain of the Church's tradition, of which past scriptural interpretation forms a part. This is important for scholarly theological interpreters of Scripture, many of whom have returned to look afresh at patristic and medieval (pre-critical) interpretation, finding inspiration within the 'habits and practices' of these confessional approaches for themselves.<sup>36</sup> In his essay, 'Embodying Scripture in the Community of Faith', L. Gregory Jones draws 'saints' from the chain of tradition together, within his use of the biblical interpretation of Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther King, for all the saints being nurtured and formed within the present Church, for despite 'differences in time, culture, denominational presumptions, and method of biblical interpretation', they share 'their commitment to Scripture'.<sup>37</sup>

Ordinary Christians are also heirs of this tradition of scriptural interpretation, but rather than through the interpretation that they have read, they receive it within the ether of the Church that they breathe, whatever its strength and form, as inheritors of the more general tradition of the Church and its local practices of Bible reading and worship, and alongside the air of the other cultural traditions within which they live. Considering the world of the ordinary Christian in the United States, Jones suggests that 'we have failed to attend adequately to the task of actually reading and embodying the texts themselves',

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture: A Short Introduction* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp. 54-55. For examples, see Fowl, 'The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas', in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, by A.K.M. Adam, and others (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 35-50; Brian E. Daly, SJ, 'Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Some Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms', in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 69-88.

<sup>37</sup> L. Gregory Jones, 'Embodying Scripture in the Community of Faith' in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 143-159 (p. 147).



commenting that even those with a ‘high view of the Bible’s authority often have rather a low competence in reading and embodying Scripture’.<sup>38</sup>

Scholarly theological interpreters call for ‘faithful’ reading within the boundaries of what in the patristic Church was described as the ‘rule of faith’, seen as provided through tradition, and as set forth in the ecumenical creeds.<sup>39</sup> Contemporary scholars seek ‘virtuous readers’ in ‘vigilant communities’ that will lead to Scripture’s embodiment within present lives.<sup>40</sup> As Christians are shaped by Scripture, it shapes their future reading. In a collection of papers from a conference of dialogue between ‘African and European readers of the Bible’, de Wit, writing from an interest in contextuality, insists on the import of developing discernment, that I suggest is in keeping with both Ignatius of Loyola and Paul Ricoeur: ‘Which readings of the bible are truly life-giving, and which ones lead to exclusion and sorrow?’<sup>41</sup> In Ignatian terms: which lead toward God and his kingdom, and which lead away?

Theological interpretation has concern for the whole Church, but generally focuses on implied rather than real readers. Rogers grounds this concern in reality through his contemporary account of the ‘hermeneutical virtues and vices of real, blood-filled Bible readers’ in England.<sup>42</sup> Yet, before such virtues may be formed ‘blood-filled’ ‘readers’ need

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<sup>38</sup> Jones, ‘Embodying Scripture’, p. 145.

<sup>39</sup> Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 7-8; Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, pp. 62-96; Rogers gives a diagrammatic summary of fourteen scholars who have proposed hermeneutical/interpretative virtues since Stephen Fowl and L. Gregory Jones wrote *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* in 1991 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock), *Congregational Hermeneutics*, p. 176.

<sup>41</sup> Hans de Wit, ‘Exegesis and Contextuality: Happy Marriage, Divorce or Living (Apart) Together?’, in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of Shared Meaning*, ed. by Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 3-30 (p. 28).

<sup>42</sup> Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, p. 37.

Scripture to be both ‘available and accessible’.<sup>43</sup> My research investigates what happens in a context where Scripture is not readily available or accessible, within the real-life situation of the orally focused Anglican churches of Gambella, when Scripture is encountered through devised biblical drama.

#### 1.4 A Ricoeurian Hermeneutic of Possibility

I have brought to this thesis a defined perception of Scripture as a confessional dynamic of memory and beckoning-call within present engagement, and an investigative concern as to what this means when Scripture is engaged with through devised biblical drama within orally focused communities. Within Paul Ricoeur’s work I found the inclusive hermeneutical approach which accords with both my perception of Scripture, and with Bevans’ conversational methodology, that is willing to include those from outside the specifically theological community within their conversation.

Mark Wallace, writing in a *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pays tribute to Ricoeur’s contribution to the field, as helping ‘to move the field away from being a historical mode of study, divorced from wider philosophical discussion toward being a thoroughgoing hermeneutical discipline informed by contemporary intellectual life’.<sup>44</sup> However, this approach of using general philosophical hermeneutical theory is contested

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<sup>43</sup> Bible Society, ‘What we do’, *About Bible Society*’  
<<http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/what-we-do/>> [accessed 17 July 2015]

<sup>44</sup> M.I. Wallace, ‘Ricoeur’, in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), pp. 403-405 (p. 403). For further, see Anthony C. Thiselton, ‘The Hermeneutics of Suspicion and Retrieval: Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Theory’, in *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 344-378. For examples of the use of Ricoeur, see de Wit, ‘Through the Eyes of Another’; Walter Brueggemann, *Redescribing Reality: What We do when We Read the Bible* (London: SCM, 2009), pp. xx-xxi.

by other scholars, as exemplified by theologians such as John Webster, who argue against the use of general hermeneutical theory in Christian theological approaches to Scripture. He insists that ‘dogmatics does not allow the particular concept [...] to be folded into the more general category [...] preferring to maximise the differences between the two and thereby to resist the subordination of Holy Scripture to cultural poetics’.<sup>45</sup> Webster is clearly pointing to approaches, such as Ricoeur’s, that he considers are non-theological in their basis and method. In contrast, Wallace insists that Ricoeur ‘has not sought to subordinate the former [biblical hermeneutics] to the latter [philosophical enquiry]’.<sup>46</sup> Vanhoozer, though within a sympathetic study of Ricoeur, shares Webster’s concern, asking ‘whether and to what extent Ricoeur’s hermeneutics may be appropriated by Christian theologians’.<sup>47</sup> Yet, his answer is less excluding than Webster’s, for he concludes: ‘Rather, like John the Baptist, Ricoeur serves the Gospel by baptizing our imaginations, philosophically preparing the way for the Word.’<sup>48</sup>

Returning to the general hermeneutical field, rather than the particular issue of Ricoeur, but in a similar vein to Vanhoozer, Rogers calls for a ‘critical appropriation’ that may provide a ‘pertinent resourcing for the task’, but which at the same time does not ‘replace a theological account of the Bible in the church with a hermeneutical one’.<sup>49</sup> Such an approach rightly suggests that theology and hermeneutical philosophy may exist side by side, the particular being fed by the general, and it accords with Bevan’s ‘creation-centred

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<sup>45</sup> John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Wallace, ‘Ricoeur’, p. 403.

<sup>47</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 225.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>49</sup> Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, pp. 4, 58-59.

orientation' in a perception of the worldly context of God's ongoing revelatory activity.<sup>50</sup>

J. Todd Billings persuasively argues that 'we are not in a theology-free zone', for '[g]iven the expansive world of God's Spirit in the world, we can affirm that "all truth is God's truth", *wherever it may be found*', adding, 'So if truth is found in philosophers such as Hans Georg Gadamer or Jürgen Habermas, Christians should *celebrate* it' – and, I must add, I have found much truth to be celebrated within the work of Paul Ricoeur, particularly, and here I am with Vanhoozer, by 'baptizing our imaginations'.<sup>51</sup>

Vanhoozer contends that Ricoeur's 'passion for possibility', that beckons our imaginations, is 'the driving force behind [his] whole theological enterprise', and it is this passion for possibility that initially drew me into Ricoeur's work.<sup>52</sup> Since childhood, I have experienced the drawing and beckoning effect of reading that has invited me to enter, experience, and explore other worlds in a way that has 'broken open and extend[ed] my own possibilities', and which has had subsequent formational effect upon my way of being, and so, of living.<sup>53</sup> This meant that when I first read Ricoeur's perception of poetic text, including Scripture, as showing a 'proposed world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities', it rang very true, speaking of the best of my experience of reading Scripture, and of my inclination to embrace an Ignatian imaginative approach to spirituality.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 35, my emphases, but otherwise as quoted in Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 131-147 (p. 133).

<sup>54</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102).

I perceive this beckoning and transformative possibility of the invitation of Scripture that Ricoeur envisages as in close accord with the imaginative approach to Scripture of Ignatius of Loyola, himself inspired by Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Jesu Christi*:

If you want to draw fruit from these scenes, you must offer yourself as present to what was said or done through our Lord Jesus Christ with the whole affective power of your mind, with loving care, with lingering delight; thus laying aside all other worries and cares. Hear and see these things being narrated, as though you were hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes [...] Read then of what has been done as though they were happening now. Bring before your eyes past actions as though they were present. Then you will feel how full of wisdom and delight they are.<sup>55</sup>

Possibility lies within a savouring of text and within imagining and wondering. Several of the theological interpreters within *The Art of Reading Scripture* write similarly, calling attention to their perception that 'many of our churches seem to have lost the art of reading [Scripture] attentively and *imaginatively*'.<sup>56</sup> Ellen Davis, writes that the purpose of 'teaching the Bible confessionally' is to enable 'people to *wonder* wisely and deeply'.<sup>57</sup> Jones' call for 'a lively scriptural *imagination*' within which 'people know and live the stories and convictions embedded in Scripture in a way that then provides the freedom for

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<sup>55</sup> Ludolph of Saxony, *Vita Jesu Christi*, trans. by James Walsh, in 'Contemplation', by Godfrey O'Donnell, in *Prayer in the Spiritual Exercises*, p. 28, available online at <<http://www.theway.org.uk>> [accessed 9 June 2016]

<sup>56</sup> Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (my emphasis), 'Introduction', *The Art of Reading Scripture*, pp. xiv-xx (p. xv).

<sup>57</sup> Ellen F. Davis (my emphasis), 'Teaching the Bible Confessionally in the Church', in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 9-26 (p. 11).

creatively (and faithfully) “*imagining the world that Scripture imagines*”.<sup>58</sup> The Ricoeurian hermeneutical dynamic of explanation, imaginative understanding and appropriation not only provides a framework for noticing what takes place within the theological interpretative process, but also draws attention to the significance of its different aspects, amongst which the affective nature of discerning imaginative possibility is crucial.

My reading of Ricoeur has provided both the foundation of perspective and the theoretical framework that has enabled discussion of the dramas of Gambella, both within their freshly devised form, but also when these interpretations become part of a tradition of interpretation, enabling me to broaden and develop my initial perceptions of the significance of the hermeneutical processes taking place.<sup>59</sup> Forming an account of the human means of a narrational telling of life, Ricoeur’s work is built upon perceptions of symbol and of critical approaches to literary texts. He has brought these philosophical and literary perceptions to his interpretative work on Scripture through an imaginative application of a structuralist approach. Such an approach does not appear to be readily accessible for those who are not trained in literary critical methods, and even less for those who ‘read’ Scripture within orally focused contexts. However, Ricoeur’s concern with the nature of Scripture as a form of tradition offering imaginative ‘proposed worlds’, and his account of hermeneutics that reaches beyond written text into life itself, renders his work particularly apposite for my own work. In consequence, I have adapted his work, in order

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<sup>58</sup> Jones (my emphases), ‘Embodying Scripture’, p. 146. Jones quotes Luke Timothy Johnson, ‘Imagining the World Scripture Imagines’, *Modern Theology*, 14 (1998), pp. 165-180.

<sup>59</sup> Discovering the hermeneutical work of Paul Ricoeur during my research, I met the plenitude of his oeuvre through a developing engagement with his essays. Consequently, within this thesis, I primarily engage with his thought as presented within a wide range of essays, rather than as set out within the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988). Rather than setting out a selection of his essays here, I invite readers to turn to the full list of what I have used provided within the bibliography.

to apply it to my own particular field of interest in imaginative and creative engagement with the biblical text for ordinary orally focused ‘readers’ through the process of devised drama.

Before moving to my next area of interest within biblical hermeneutics, this consideration of Ricoeur offers the place in which to introduce the terminology of ‘worlds’ that I follow within the thesis. These oft used terms are descriptive of ‘horizons of interest’. Forming and limiting the view, they are indicative of aim and purpose of engagement.<sup>60</sup> I use Paul Ricoeur’s description of these horizons: the world-behind-the-text seeks to understand the author and the world that formed the text; the world-of-the-text (or the text-itself) looks to what is contained within; and the-world-in-front-of-the-text seeks to understand the dynamic between text and ‘readers’, as they engage with the text within their own context, which is described as the world-of-the-‘reader’.<sup>61</sup> As Anthony Thiselton indicates, these horizontal viewpoints have become commonplace shorthand, and through uniting each term within one hyphenated word I emphasize their nature as forming a word-like concept.<sup>62</sup> Yet, as is the way of models, actuality is always more complex, and

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<sup>60</sup> Robert Morgan, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 271. These horizons form a major interest within Andrew Village’s empirical study of Bible-reading among ordinary English Anglicans, *The Bible and Lay People*, pp. 77-95. He led a similar study within the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project, Anglican Communion, *Deep Engagement: Fresh Discovery* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2012), pp. 43-46.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation’, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 131-144 (140-144).

<sup>62</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 57; see also Village, *Bible and Lay People*, p. 77.

though ‘it is a helpful starting place’, Paula Gooder correctly comments that ‘multiple strands are present in any given interpretation’.<sup>63</sup>

My concern in this work begins with the ‘reading’ of the text-as-it-is, for this is what is canonical, holding the memory that forms our remembrance. Though canonical, it remains necessarily fluid because we have no set form or language for the authoritative text. This very fluidity demands that interpretation is a necessary part of engagement with the canonical text, and so calls for a faithful approach to the text, that yet must of necessity also be affected by the context of the world-of-the-‘reader’, but it is this very dynamic of imaginative faithfulness moving between the world-of-the-text and the world-of-the-‘reader’ within which beckoning possibility may be heard, listened to, and acted upon. Ricoeur, writing of general hermeneutics, insists on the withdrawal of the author in the release of the text. Yet, I suggest that it is even so, in the face of divinely inspired and authoritative Scripture, for our God is not a coercive god, and the faithful ‘reader’ is called to seek the God who is not only behind-the-text, but is also within-the-text, and perhaps, most crucially, beckons ‘readers’ to life in-front-of-the-text within their own world-of-‘readership’ within the kingdom of God.

### **1.5 Biblical Performance Criticism**

Within the field of biblical scholarship, and having clear links to my research, the emergent field of biblical performance criticism uses both theory and practice of performance as an approach to its biblical interpretation, developed in response to what its proponents perceive as a primary orality of the biblical text. Described as a ‘paradigm shift from print medium to oral medium’, they maintain that meaning is affected when Scripture

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<sup>63</sup> Paula Gooder, ed., ‘Introduction’, in *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2008), pp. xv-xxi (p. xix).



is perceived as a script for oral performance, so demanding a fresh approach to interpretation that is based on performance.<sup>64</sup> As such, their method of research offers my study helpful insight from the perspective of biblical studies, in that it engages critical, oral, and also performance approaches to the text.

Some of these scholars use drama, theatre and performance theory as an aid to their work, without having interest in contemporary performance of Scripture. Though William Doan and Terry Giles' seek a 'performance mode of thought' to 'capture the imaginative as well as the cognitive aspect of human discourse', they distance themselves from any performative research, insisting that 'this kind of investigation is not really what we are about'.<sup>65</sup> However, for most of the scholars involved in the field, such as David Rhoads, a leading proponent, contemporary performance is an essential tool.<sup>66</sup> This develops from earlier work on orality, by Rhoads and others, such as the influential Tom Boomershine, both New Testament Scholar and founder of the Network of Biblical Storytellers.<sup>67</sup> Biblical performance criticism can be seen as an affirmative answer to Boomershine's challenge to biblical scholarship: '[T]he decision before contemporary biblical criticism is

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<sup>64</sup> David Rhoads, 'What is Performance Criticism?', in *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, ed. by Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), pp. 83-100 (p. 88). Also see Biblical Performance Criticism's website <<http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org>> [accessed 8 June 2016]

<sup>65</sup> William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T and T Clark, 2005), page x. See also, Terry Giles and William Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009); Jeanette Mathews, *Performing Habakkuk: Faithful Re-enactment in the Midst of Crisis* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Rhoads, 'What is Performance Criticism?', p. 84.

<sup>67</sup> Adam Gilbert Bartholomew with David Rhoads, 'Introduction: A Passion for Communicating the Gospel: An Account of Tom Boomershine as Scholar, Teacher, and Biblical Storyteller', in *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, ed. by Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), pp. xv-xxiii.

whether oral interpretation is a necessary step, and perhaps even a goal, of the interpretative process.’<sup>68</sup>

This scholarly interest in and use of performance today, as part of a historical-critical interpretative research process, perceives performance ‘then’ and performance ‘now’ as linked, suggesting that as a way of making meaning, the ‘then’ is most authentically accessed via the contemporary performance experience. Rhoads writes: ‘We can never recover a first-century performative event, but we can experiment with twenty-first century performances as a way to help us understand the meaning and rhetoric of the biblical texts in their historical context’.<sup>69</sup> As illustration, James Maxey performs Philemon in its original Greek at academic conferences, as well as for classes of students.<sup>70</sup> Performance within this scholarly field remains primarily an academic exercise.

Despite their focus on the original orality of the text, the scholars of biblical performance criticism perceive a hermeneutical import in their contemporary practical research whereby a process of translation, preparation and performance leads to fresh interpretation. Rhoads writes of the necessary preparatory ‘immersion’ of the performer in the text to gain a thorough and detailed knowledge of the explicit and implicit content, of what is there within the text, and of what is not there through its gaps, so that through imagination, the ‘narrative world becomes three-dimensional’.<sup>71</sup> By their concentration on live oral performance, their seemingly historical approach of looking at the world-behind-

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas E. Boomershine, ‘Peter’s Denial as Polemic or Confession: the Implications of Media Criticism for Biblical Hermeneutics, in *Orality, Aurality and Biblical Narrative*, ed. by Lou H. Silberman, Semeia 39 (Decatur: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 47-68 (p. 65).

<sup>69</sup> Rhoads, ‘What is Performance Criticism?’, pp. 88-9.

<sup>70</sup> James A. Maxey, *From Orality to Orality: A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), p. 147.

<sup>71</sup> Rhoads, ‘What is Performance Criticism?’, pp. 96-97.

the-text intrinsically has to focus on close reading of the text-itself and on the world-of-the-contemporary-reader because their practical research takes place now, rather than then.

Rhoads views meaning as emanating from the totality of the performance event, rather than from just the content of the text itself, according with reader-response criticism's insistence that the context of 'reading' plays a major part in the finding of meaning.<sup>72</sup> Rather than providing an account of 'ideas, beliefs, values', he considers the rhetorical and formational aim of a performance of Scripture is focused on its affectivity and effectivity, 'what it *does* in performance [...] what does a story or a letter lead the audience to become?'<sup>73</sup> Their interest lies less in the effect of the text on the 'reader' than on the effect of the performed text on an audience. This authorial task of creative interpretation, made in cooperation with the text, is also the task of devised drama, even where there is no formal audience envisaged.

This use of contemporary performance as interpretation links biblical performance criticism with my own research. For Rhoads, what is unfolded from within the text has to be translated from the textual and printed word into the embodied, temporal and spatial nature of a story-telling performance event that yet retains the words of the text-as-it-is (in whatever translation they are using). Within devised drama, this individual task described by Rhoads, becomes the collegial task of a group and demands further spatial translation and change of form in order to re-tell the text in an embodied re-presentation that happens 'as-if' it were happening within the present. The canonical text within a book has become a non-canonical, embodied interpretation. The major difference between biblical

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<sup>72</sup> For a brief account of reader-response theory see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 212-214.

<sup>73</sup> David Rhoads, 'Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies – Part 1', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 36/3 (2006), 1-16 (p. 16).

performance criticism's expectation of a story-telling approach to the text-as-it-is and my own interest in the greater flexibility of devised drama is in the form of the performance. Yet, telling stories through enaction by a group of characters, rather than a narrator, can be seen as a logical progression of the critical methodology when it moves from a strictly historical search behind-the-text. Richard Swanson makes such a move into what he calls 'ensemble performance', suggesting that fresh layers of meaning are brought out when a story is imagined and shown in corporate and spatial terms as well as temporal ones.<sup>74</sup> However, despite contemporary performances beyond academia, in venues such as prisons, biblical performance criticism's scholarly interests and concerns in performance remain primarily historical-critical in their focus on initial audiences of the New Testament material, and in their use within the university as a practical method of teaching a performance-critical approach to interpretation.<sup>75</sup> Their primary focus is not on the ordinary contemporary Christian.

The exception to this is James Maxey's research on an oral approach to translation for the Vuté people of Cameroon in which he sought to make a contemporary application of the field's insights and interests that is more in accord with my own research. He works from the translator's sense of frustration that while seeking to liberate 'readers' by making the biblical text available in the vernacular, illiteracy always confounds their efforts: 'What

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<sup>74</sup> Richard W. Swanson, 'Taking Place/Taking up Space', in *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, ed. by Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), pp. 129-141. See also, Björn Krondorfer, ed., *Body and Bible: Interpreting and Experiencing Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1992); Peter A. Pitzele, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> For an account of performances outside the academy, see David Rhoads, 'Performance Criticism: Emerging Methodology' 1, p. 14. For an account of the use of performance in university teaching see Philip Ruge-Jones, 'The Word Heard: How Hearing a Text Differs from Reading one' in *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, ed. by Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), pp. 142-155 (p. 101-102).

good will a translated New Testament do if the Vuté people cannot read their own language?’<sup>76</sup> Maxey’s aptly named work, *From Orality to Orality*, draws a parallel between contemporary orality and an originary orality of the biblical text, emphasising a need for a performed form of Scripture as a characteristic of all orally focused communities. Maxey calls for a ‘liberating movement’, to transform receivers of printed texts into agents, through a collaborative approach to translation that reaches fruition in oral performance through story-telling.<sup>77</sup>

Though Maxey’s concern is with biblical translation rather than hermeneutics and with story-telling rather than drama, his frustrations and concerns for the orally focused Vuté people are paralleled in my experience with the Nilotic Anglicans of Gambella. My search for, and exploration of fresh and creative means of engagement with Scripture is also focused on enabling agency. As yet within biblical performance criticism, there seems no concern, such as mine, for the collaborative making of devised drama, as a tool of engagement with Scripture, for ordinary Christians within their local church setting, or even perhaps, for the academy and Church learning from the oral methods of interpretation that such ordinary ‘readers’ use. However, like biblical performance criticism, my interest in interpretation through drama necessitates a journey into drama, theatre and performance theory.

Within its discipline, terminology of theatre, drama and performance is given precise, though not always identical meaning. I follow its usage in Gambella, elucidated here in conversation with the leading performance scholar, Richard Schechner’s definitions

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<sup>76</sup> Maxey, *From Orality to Orality*, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp. 193-196.

and descriptions.<sup>78</sup> My primary term is *drama*, indicating the activity of *devising* as in ‘making a drama’, and its resultant created form as ‘the drama’ that can be enacted (as in the Greek *dran*, meaning doing, acting or making).<sup>79</sup> This is the way in which the people of Gambella use the word and is in line with ‘ordinary’ English usage (as in the school subject), rather than within Schechner’s academic use of the word to denote the written text that is separate from its performance. I use the words *perform* and *performance* to indicate the activity and event of enacting the drama, again emphasising the ‘doing’ side of the activity, and so particularly appropriate for the activity of devising where players may perform informally, and for themselves alone, unlike Schechner’s term ‘theatre’ (with its etymological emphasis on showing) which I do not use. Schechner uses the word ‘performance’ to describe ‘the whole constellation of events’ taking place within the time frame in which performers and spectators share the performing and viewing space. For this, I use the word *programme*, for such is how these times of sharing are denoted by the people of Gambella. Thus, Schechner’s nest of textual drama, within its showing as theatre that itself lies within a performance event, within the terms of my writing must be understood as an activity of *devising* to make a *drama*, that is performed or shown, either informally, or when shown within a more formal event, as part of a *programme*.

My perception of the nature and interpretative processes involved in devising and performing drama had been less clearly developed than my view of Scripture, and consequently, I have engaged with a range of scholars of theatre and performance.

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Schechner, ‘Drama, Script, Theater and Performance’, in *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 66-11 (pp. 70-71). See also the discussion in Helen Nicholson, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 2-5.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Schechner, ‘Actuals’, in *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 26-65 (p. 33).<sup>80</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film*, trans. by David Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 252-258.

Ricoeur's account of a hermeneutical arc led me to a resonant account within the leading French theatre scholar, Patrice Pavis' work.<sup>80</sup> I have also followed Doan and Giles' lead in using Bernard Beckerman's differentiation between act-schemes and act-image which gives a performance based account of the mimetic nature of drama offering Ricoeurian possibility.<sup>81</sup> This leads to Jill Dolan's work on 'utopian performatives' through which drama makes a particular draw to an alternative future that bears resemblance to both Ricoeur's proposed worlds and Christian eschatology.<sup>82</sup> My theoretical account is always brought into relationship with the hermeneutical theory of Ricoeur, and with the reflections on drama of the church leaders of Gambella, together with their dramatic practice, leading toward developing a hermeneutic of drama and to a closer examination of the present practice of biblical drama in Gambella.

## 1.6 The Contribution of Practical Theology

Ordinary biblical hermeneutics seeks to bring the ordinary Christian 'reader' into the conversation of biblical scholarship. My focus develops from concern at problems of scriptural engagement for orally focused Christians, and the possibility that devised biblical drama may enable such ordinary interpretation to enhance the faithful practices of the Church within the contemporary world. This dynamic of God, Church, and world is where my engagement within ordinary biblical hermeneutics reaches toward, and is

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<sup>80</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film*, trans. by David Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 252-258.

<sup>81</sup> Doan and Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power*; Bernard Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, ed. by Gloria Brim Beckerman and William Coco (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 28-42, 101-109.

<sup>82</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

influenced by the concern of practical theology for the reality of what-is in conversation with and in the light of an eschatological what-has-been-is-and-will-be.<sup>83</sup>

In *Talking about God in Practice*, an ecumenical group of practical theologians posit a dynamic of four ‘interrelated’, ‘overlapping’ and ‘echoing’ voices which resonates with the hermeneutical conversation of my research.<sup>84</sup> Firstly, the Church offers its normativity through its authoritative tradition and formal statements that both form viewpoints and act as possible boundaries within a confessional approach to Scripture. As perceptions of Scripture as ‘the word of the Lord’ are talked about more generally and less formally within a contemporary church, whether by groups or individuals, what is offered are espoused voices, developed from, interpreting, and remaining in relationship with the normative voices, and seen within this research in both the reflections on biblical engagement of the church leaders of Gambella, and in the developed discussion of the *Anglican Bible in the Life of the Church* report. Yet, as noted within this report, what we say and what we do are not always the same, and what is done offers an operant metaphorical voice to the conversation, seen within this research through the biblical dramas of Gambella. These operant voices of practice take their place and have effect alongside the vocal and written espoused, and the normative, authoritative voice. The fourth voice is that of the theological practitioner, offering a ‘formal’, critical voice to the conversation, as heard here through my voice as I listen to and reflect on the conversations

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<sup>83</sup> This sentence is written with Stephen Pattison and James Woodward’s series of eight polarities in mind, in ‘An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology’, in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral Theology*, ed. by Pattison and Woodward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 1-19 (pp. 15-16). See also, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), p. 6; Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies, and Frances Ward, *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM, 2005), p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2010), pp. 53-56.



that I bring together, both of the formal discussions of scholarship, and of the operant and espoused voices of practice.

I have been influenced by practical theology's turn to situated reality as a movement that embraces life as-it-is, and acknowledges its contextual particularities, as it seeks to connect theory with practice by investigating telling-cases that illuminate, test and extend theoretical thinking.<sup>85</sup> It is also a warning against overly hasty generalizations. The importance of context and particularity acts as a reminder that we do not live in a one-size-fits-all world. My illustration of the devised biblical drama of Gambella will not tell the story for all. However, it may provide a place that will carry analogies that suggest transferable possibilities through identification and resonance.<sup>86</sup> Without such an illustrative focus my research would remain a generalized and idealised possibility that may have little connection with any form of possible reality. Conversely, without an accompanying theoretical approach, my research would merely be of one particularity, with no possible links to the wider church and world. By using my situated telling-case of devised biblical drama in Gambella, in juxtaposition with my more theoretical research, I shall be in a better position to begin to gather issues and themes that may resonate and have something to say within a wider context as I seek to make an informed, reflective and critically aware answer to my question of what devised biblical drama has to offer the interpretative processes and the formation and nurture of ordinary orally focused Christians.

## 1.7 Conclusion

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<sup>85</sup> Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 4-5.

<sup>86</sup> Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 47.

This chapter has formed the first part of my methodological consideration of my research as conversation within biblical hermeneutics. I have discussed the position of ordinary ‘readers’ within the scholarly field, and found links within the search for faithful ‘reading’ in the confessional approach of theological interpretation that insists on treating the Bible as Scripture. The concerns of this research have also taken me to the places where biblical hermeneutics and studies reaches into the hospitality of other disciplines, within the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, the drama, theatre and performance theory utilized by biblical performance scholarship, and the essentially inter-disciplinary field of practical theology and its use of qualitative research methods.

Returning to John’s remark with which I opened this chapter, he places me, the author, in the role of mediator between his context within the Anglican churches of Gambella and my ‘university’; between the world of the orally focused ordinary ‘reader’ within the local church and the world of the critically trained and focused academy. Having drawn together my scholarly conversation partners, there are two that remain missing, the Anglicans of Gambella, and myself, as author. Introducing these provides the contextual setting and relationships for the research, and forms the reflexive subject of the next chapter.



## Chapter Two

### Contexts in Relationship:

#### Charting the Conversation continued

*Mary* is coming here to learn from us, and to show this understanding to the people in her university; to read our mind, they have to read our understanding.

*(John Gach Dak)*<sup>1</sup>

My research is built upon the illustration of the orally focused Anglican churches of Gambella. In this, I do not allege that it is indicative of the character of all such communities, even within sub-Saharan Africa. Other places would provide differing illustrations, but through the picture of Gambella I seek to offer resonance with the issues such communities face within their engagement with Scripture. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the contexts that lie behind the research, and I begin with a description of Gambella and its Anglican churches.

In the quotation, above, John had described me as both ‘learner’ and mediator, a conduit that would take reflections and understanding from his world to the world of the Western university scholar. Yet, standing between these two worlds of my research, I am also a conversation partner, with all of the differing voices that make up my research, with the Anglicans of Gambella introduced in this chapter, and also with the scholarly voices presented in the last chapter. I am a conversation partner and not a conduit, for I necessarily came to the research from within my own world of subjectivity. I introduce this context here, a reflexive account of the personal archaeology that clarifies my relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Drama Project, Tuesday, December 2011.

with the conversation partners that I bring together within this research. This, together with my introduction to the Anglicans of Gambella, provides the necessary background for the rest of the chapter's focus, on the methodology and method of the qualitative research of my fieldwork.

## **2.1 Gambella and its Anglican Churches**

The episcopal area of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia (within the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa) is primarily based in the poor, rural and remote Gambella region in the far west of the country. The majority of the population lead subsistence livelihoods (34.3% of the population live below the poverty line), exacerbated by the annual flooding that means that the region is 'food insecure for three to four months each year'.<sup>2</sup> There are also several large refugee camps in the region, populated by those fleeing the waves of civil war in Sudan (1994, also before, and continuing). The Anglican Church in this region consists of about fifty-three church congregations, divided into eleven Mission Centres.<sup>3</sup> Originally brought by refugees to the camps, the Anglican Church has spread into Gambella Town and the villages lining the Baro River, a tributary of the Nile. The international boundary is an accident of history rather than social-geography, and the congregations, refugee and non-refugee alike, are all of the Nilotic ethnic groups which straddle this border.

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<sup>2</sup> Elvia van den Berg, 'Contextual Analysis of the Gambella Region: for the Anglican Church in Ethiopia' (unpublished report, Sunkuri Consult, May 2006), pp. 8-9, used with permission.

<sup>3</sup> These numbers and the following descriptions accord with the Anglican Church in Ethiopia at the time of my fieldwork, December 2011.

The Anglican Church in the Gambella region consists primarily of four ethnic groups, Nuer, Anuak, Opo, and Dinka, each speaking their own language.<sup>4</sup> All share the inheritance of living at the margins of the East African revival.<sup>5</sup> Yet, and probably more influential, each group has differing church roots due to Protestant missionary spheres of influence, and also due to their differing times of entry into the Anglican Church (see figure 2.1 below). The Church Missionary Society of the Church of England began work among the Dinka of Sudan at the beginning of the twentieth century, and there were Anglican Dinka congregations within the refugee camps of Gambella from the mid-1990s.<sup>6</sup> Many have now returned to Sudan.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-twentieth century American Presbyterians were working among the Nuer within Sudan.<sup>8</sup> During the political turmoil of the early 1990s a group of Nuer from the border area became Anglican and fled to Gambella Town, setting up St. Luke's Church there in about 1994. Due to internal tensions in Pinyidu refugee camp, a number of Presbyterian congregations joined the Anglican Church in

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<sup>4</sup> The Anglican Church in Ethiopia also includes Mabaan and 'minority' Equatorian ethnic groups from South Sudan in the refugee camp in Sherkole. In Addis Ababa there is a multi-national congregation. History within this paragraph is built upon the account given by fieldwork participants, supplemented by conversations throughout my involvement with these churches (2005-2011). Footnotes indicate documentary evidence. The 'Anuak' are so described in all Anglican Church documentation (following Evans-Pritchard in his Nuer trilogy). They are referred to as 'Anywaa' by Dereje Feyissa, as being closer to their self-description, *Playing Different Games: the Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-Wood, eds., *The East African Revival: History and Legacies* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 1, 4, 8; Andrew Wheeler, 'Richard Jones and the Sudan Revival of 1938', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 71:2 (2002), 168-186.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 328.

<sup>7</sup> This records the situation in 2011 shortly after the independence of South Sudan. With the present escalation of violence in South Sudan, refugees once more flock across the border. The *Church Times* reports a five-fold rise in refugees in the region (49,000 to 270,00) since December 2013, Madeleine Davies, 'Dr Anis urges prayer after border attack', 22 April 2016, p.13.

<sup>8</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 48-49 (footnote); Heather J. Sharkey, 'American Presbyterians, Freedmen's Missions, and the Nile Valley: Missionary History, Racial Orders, and Church Politics on the World Stage', *Journal of Religious History*, 35.1 (March 2011), 24-42 (p. 33).

1996. The Anglican Church among the Nuer in Ethiopia has spread from these two roots, forming its largest ethnic group. The Anuak church leaders stated that Christianity had been brought to Gambella Town by American Bethel Baptists.<sup>9</sup> A first group of Baptists within Gambella Town joined the Anglican Church in 2004/2005, subsequently bringing in church groups from the surrounding villages. Other Anuak Anglican churches have developed within and around refugee camps (from about 2005). The small ethnic group of the Opo have been evangelised in the twenty-first century (2004/2005) by members of the Church in Itang, a parish of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia. They now form an established Mission Centre and have their own priest.

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Evangelization and Approximate date of entry into Anglican Church in Ethiopia (ACE)</b>
Dinka	Church Mission Society (Anglican), from early 20 <sup>th</sup> century Anglican Church in Ethiopia from about 1994
Nuer	American Presbyterian Church, from mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century Anglican Church in Ethiopia, from about 1994
Anuak	American Bethel Baptist Church, from mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century Anglican Church in Ethiopia, from 2004/2005
Opo	Itang parish, Anglican Church in Ethiopia, from 2004/2005

Figure 2.1 Evangelization of major Ethnic Groups within Anglican Church in Ethiopia

My connection with these churches began in February 2005 when I was invited by Andrew Proud (chaplain of St Matthew's Church in Addis Ababa, and having oversight of

<sup>9</sup> Feyissa suggests an American Presbyterian Church mission was the first to be established among the Anuak in the Gambella region (1952), *Playing Different Games*, p. 162.

the churches in Gambella) to teach a week's course on the gospel of Mark to the church leaders (priests, deacons and lay readers).<sup>10</sup> From 2006-2009, I led their scheme of initial theological education (Theological Education by Extension, hereafter TEE), writing the course and visiting three times a year to teach a module to a group of tutors who subsequently taught each module within their Mission Centres.<sup>11</sup> I have since returned to undertake a short fieldwork project (December 2011).<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 Reflexive Archaeology

This research, as I have already indicated within the Introduction, grew out of my experience of Gambella, and was given impetus through my reflections on Phyllis Tribble's work on Jeremiah. Experience in leading groups within English Anglican parishes had already shown me how often the possibility of hearing a beckoning call from Scripture seems severely limited by problems of biblical engagement: 'It might as well be in Latin for all the sense it makes to me', was a conversational confession about hearing Scripture during Sunday worship, made by a life-long English Anglican. Such problems are exacerbated by illiteracy. My encounter with Jeremiah in company with Tribble had led to an intuition of drama as an alternative hermeneutic that could enfranchise the ordinary 'reader' and hearer of Scripture. Moments of intuition do not spring out of nowhere and it was one more factor in a chain of experiences leading to this present consideration of devised drama as a way of engaging with Scripture. I include an account of this gradual

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Proud subsequently became the suffragan bishop of the episcopal area of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, April 2007 – April 2011.

<sup>11</sup> For further on the TEE scheme, see Mary Witts, 'TEE tutors trained in Addis Ababa', in *The ANITEPAM Bulletin: Newsletter of the African Network of Institutions of Theological Education Preparing Anglicans for Ministry*, May 2006, 4, 9-10; and 'Theological Education by Extension, February 2006 - January 2009: Report of the Course Director for the course Review' (unpublished report, Anglican Church in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, February 2009), used with permission.

<sup>12</sup> For the fieldwork project, see below, p. 76.



movement for it introduces the pedagogical perception of drama behind this research as well as outlining my confessional, theological, and cultural background, and adding further on my relationship with the Anglicans of Gambella.

In the autumn of 2005, I was invited to design, write and teach a course of basic theological education for the leaders of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia. I showed the projected first module, *The Roots of our Faith*, to the Bishop of Egypt, of whose diocese this is a far flung corner. This was to be an introductory academic course that recognised, valued, shared, used and built on the varying life experiences of its students. At its heart was group discussion. Yet, it remained essentially an intellectually-focused course for the literate and bilingual, for it was designed to encourage critical reflection, and was written and taught in English. Bishop Mouneer Anis took a more imaginative approach to the issue, ‘This is very good, but these people are not ready for this. They need to know their Bibles. These people need Bible stories. You can do wonderful teaching of Bible stories by using drama.’<sup>13</sup> And so the objectives of the TEE project were extended to include a linked course (known as ‘lay-training’) that could benefit the whole congregation, and which, following Bishop Mouneer’s lead was to include the use of drama. The bishop had commended drama as a means to re-tell biblical narratives in a memorable way, but my previous experience led to a perception that drama carried further possibilities.

Over thirty years earlier, I had studied drama as part of my training as a teacher and discovered a heuristic world of devising and improvisation, where thinking took place through group work and discussion, but more importantly through the added element of the doing of representational action. We were expected to experiment and play with ideas and

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<sup>13</sup> Comment (as remembered) by the Most Revd Dr Mouneer Anis, Anglican Bishop of Egypt, North Africa and the Horn of Africa, December 2005, used with permission.

issues, not with our minds alone but by getting up and acting them out, to display them for others as well as for ourselves. It was intended as a holistic engagement, for through embodiment our imaginations and creativity were exercised and extended as well as our intellects, together with our social skills, as we learnt to make use of each other's gifts and abilities for the good of the whole. It was an enabling, confidence-building experience, totally different to that of the traditional chalk-and-talk of my other subjects. From this education it was the remembered experience of the possibilities of drama that remained with me, influencing the later development of my learner-centred, experience-valuing, group-focused pedagogy that seeks to value, affirm and enable people within their own contexts.

My earliest theological education (according to Astley's terms) took place a few years after my teacher-training, within the confessional setting of an Anglican Diocesan Bishop's Certificate course, where I discovered the excitement of being enabled and encouraged to explore and think more deeply about many aspects of my own faith within the wider world of Christian tradition.<sup>14</sup> Since this initial experience, I have taught on such courses, re-discovering and using the Freirian participative pedagogical principles that I had first encountered studying drama, where discussion is based on experience, drawing out from and beyond it.<sup>15</sup> Studying theology, part-time, as an external student at a Methodist theological college, at the same time as I was teaching it to area-based groups on

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<sup>14</sup> The Diocese of Bath and Wells' present 'Bishop's course', *Exploring Christianity* is described on the diocesan web site as, 'for all lay people who want to explore faith, deepen their commitment and learn together with other interested students', School of Formation, 'Exploring Christianity' <<http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-ministry/school-of-formation/lay-training/exploring-christianity.aspx>> [accessed 8 June 2016]

<sup>15</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972). These principles underpin such works as Laurie Green's *Let's Do Theology: Resources for Contextual Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Mowbray, 2009), pp. 4-6. See also Yvonne Craig, *Learning for Life: A Handbook of Adult Religious Education* (London: Mowbray, 1994), pp. 27-30.

open-access courses within the broad-church breadth of the rural and small-town world of the Diocese of Bath and Wells, in Somerset, meant that my critical theological education developed within confessional settings in the midst of my every-day family and parochial life as an Anglican vicar's wife. My theology is therefore enmeshed within my own experience and spirituality. It has necessitated a 'general practitioner' approach rather than one of specialization, remaining attuned to the life of individuals within real local churches, but holding and developing an awareness of this locally based life within its wider ecclesial, cultural, global, and intellectual worlds.

The potentialities of practical drama, as experienced in my young adult life, surfaced again at the beginning of the twenty-first century when, as a post-graduate student of theology, I explored the biblical book of the prophet Micah.<sup>16</sup> As a unity, the text of Micah makes little, if any sense. Most critics view it as a patchwork of additions and redactions made at differing stages of Israel's life.<sup>17</sup> However, reading it as a single entity offers diverse voices in conflict and tension, rather than a prophetic monologue.<sup>18</sup> This evoked possibilities of dialogical drama, and therefore of performance as a means of making sense of the text. Through Micah I became aware of the problems and challenges, but also the gift of textual un-decidability. My caution in outlining a definitive multi-vocal

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Witts, 'The Voices of Micah: Making Sense of the Text?' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Bristol, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of scholarship on Micah, see J.T. Willis, 'Micah', in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), pp. 150-153.

<sup>18</sup> Some critical works on Micah notice an occasional presence of changing voices within the text. None of these studies had followed through the implication of these voices for possible drama. See David Gerald Hagstrom, *The Coherence of the Book of Micah: A Literary Analysis* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); James Luther Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1976); A.S. van der Woude, 'Micah in Dispute with the Pseudo-Prophets', *Vetus Testamentum*, 19 (1969), 244-260, and 'Three Classical Prophets: Amos, Hosea, and Micah' in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Ackroyd*, ed. by Richard Coggins and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 32-57.

interpretation suggested that sense of the under-determined could also be explored and discerned through the communal interpretation of a group drama project within a local church setting, as well as by an individual having the authority of professional scholarship. The experience of drama that had remained semi-latent since my youth surfaced again in these projections of my later research, alongside my continuing concern for the ordinary world of local churches.

Any drama teaching skills that I had ever possessed had long lain dormant. My experience of life was almost entirely provincial English. Teaching the church leaders of Gambella at the beginning of 2005 had been horizon-broadening and energising, for here I had met and worked with a group of people whose life-experience was so very different to mine. I was humbled by the strength of their faith in the face of the hardships of their lives. Yet, despite our cultural differences and language difficulties, we were strongly bound by our common humanity, faith, and Church, as I sought to enable the group to find for themselves some of the wonders of Mark's story-telling. My experience was profound, brief, and expected to be a once-in-a-life-time opportunity. Yet, at the end of the year, I agreed to write and teach a three-year, nine module course for these same people, that was now to include drama, and was to begin in February. The extra 'Lay-training' elements of the course including devised dramatizations of biblical narratives had little preparation. Thus, in teaching, I simply (and, with hindsight probably most helpfully) approached our drama work with, 'Go and make a drama ....' Everyone was enthusiastic and willing to play. No one ever said, 'I don't want to', or 'I can't.' When the tutors went home they used the same activities with their students.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> An account of a Mothers' Union training session attests to the continuing use of drama in Gambella, Diocese of Egypt website, *Horn of Africa*

This lengthy reflexive account offers the theological, confessional and cultural context underpinning this research. My inter-cultural awareness continues to be nurtured within a confessional setting, through teaching Christian Doctrine to first-year ministerial students in London, with backgrounds in diverse cultures and churches that are once more very different to my own experience. So, my theological (and pedagogical) concern, primarily developed within confessional settings, continues to seek to accord value to individuals and communities, whoever and wherever they are, at the same time as remaining centred on the enablement and formation of ordinary Christians within *their* own cultural setting. This present research is at one with this general inclination and concern for justice and liberation.

## **2.3 Qualitative Research: Fieldwork in Gambella**

### **2.3.1 An ‘Ethnographic’ Approach**

My research began in my experience of devised biblical drama in Gambella and required closer investigation for it to form an illustrative focus to aid my consideration of devised drama’s value as a hermeneutical tool. Qualitative research methods offered the means, to which I have taken an ‘ethnographic’ approach. As developed within anthropology, ethnography indicates what the ethicist, Elizabeth Phillips describes as ‘an extraordinarily comprehensive and holistic study of a culture’ that is made over a long and immersed visit.<sup>20</sup> This was not possible for my focused research on the single issue of devised biblical drama. Hammersley and Atkinson call for the reflexivity of ‘ethnographic

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<<http://www.dioceseofegypt.org/2014/10/made-us-teachers-2/>> [accessed 10 December 2015]

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Phillips, ‘Charting the “Ethnographic Turn”: Theologians and the Study of Christian Congregations’, in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 95-106 (p. 102).

approaches' to be within the grasp of a wider range of social science researchers, since when many other scholarly disciplines have also adopted and modified its methods.<sup>21</sup> I follow these looser approaches, such as advocated by Pete Ward and others, in the method's adoption and adaptation by practical theology.<sup>22</sup>

From within the field of the social sciences, Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt adopt a pragmatic understanding within their depiction of seven 'core ethnographic values' (that I have grouped as three).<sup>23</sup> These provide my research with a framework, for their values have all been within my concern as I planned, undertook, reflected and wrote up my research. Firstly, they describe the necessary participation and immersion through fieldwork as a practicable 'depth of engagement' in the socio-cultural worlds being researched. This was made possible through my prior depth of relationship with the Anglican churches of Gambella, as the foundation on which my return visit to Gambella for fieldwork was built. Secondly, they call for an ethical awareness, attitude and approach to the research (including issues of power) that pays due reflexive attention to all participants within the research (including the researcher), in how they are engaged with and represented as well as of the issue being researched. This issue can be seen acutely where, as in this research, my context as researcher is so very different from the lived context of those who are the researched, and accords with my concern for the apparent marginalization of the orally focused within the wider Church. The final group of

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<sup>21</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 237.

<sup>22</sup> Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> The seven core values are: 1) Participation, 2) Immersion, 3) Reflection, reflexivity and representation, 4) Thick description, 5) Active participative ethics, 6) Empowerment, 7) Understanding, Julie Scott Jones and Sal Watt, eds., *Ethnography in Social Science Practice* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 6, quoted by Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology*, pp. 6-7.

characteristics or values concern interpretation and writing up, in the use of thick description and an understanding that Scott Jones and Watt describe as creating ‘interpretative bridges’ (Max Weber) that is like ‘catching an illusion [...] reading a poem’ (Geertz).<sup>24</sup> These analogies suggest the role of the researcher to be mediational, between the participants and the issues under investigation on the one side with the recipients of the research on the other, seeking to ‘catch’ something that can never be caught, for not only will this be only one telling, but also there will always be so much more beyond any telling. Such a position calls for a combination of sympathy, empathy and clear sight on the part of the researcher, as will be made apparent within the following discussion of my use of an adopted and adapted ‘ethnographic approach’.

I based my research on Gambella because as a context it remains particularly apposite. Firstly, the Anglican Churches of Gambella are a clear illustration of the rural orally focused Anglican communities of my concern with their problems of engagement with Scripture, and their position seemingly at the margins of the world of the Anglican Communion. In addition, this group of churches was a situation that I already knew at some depth, and so one from which I could build on my partial knowledge of their use of drama.<sup>25</sup> Finally, through this prior involvement in the life of the churches as a regularly visiting educator I had already played a similar role to that of the ‘detached involvement’ required of an ethnographic researcher. My depth of immersion had left me as both an insider and an outsider within this context. This is seen as necessary where a researcher aims for a critical involvement that enables perception through two cultural lenses at the

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<sup>24</sup> Scott Jones and Watt, *Ethnography in Social Science Practice*, pp. 9-10, in Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Between 2005 and 2009 I visited Ethiopia thirteen times for involvement with the churches of Gambella, generally for periods of between three and four weeks. Back home in England, I remained practically engaged in the life of these churches through writing courses and marking work.

same time, seeking to closely understand that of the local community while retaining the distance and objectivity that is offered by the different perspective of one's own.<sup>26</sup> In Gambella I could build on what already was: a depth of relationship that also carried its sense of apartness.

Bringing the 'ethnographic approach', as outlined in my discussion of Scott Jones and Watt, to my need for an illustrative focus formed the methods that I used for the qualitative research that lies at the centre of this study. Pragmatic and ethical decisions necessarily dictate many of the parameters within which any fieldwork may take place.<sup>27</sup> There are issues of timing, access, availability and language that must be negotiated between the needs of the researcher, the needs of the researched and of the gatekeepers of their organization.<sup>28</sup> The wellbeing of the researched and their gatekeepers must be of paramount importance, for the researcher is in the position of an invited guest who must not trample over the lives of those offering hospitality. Pragmatism and flexibility were essential ingredients of both the planning and the activity of the fieldwork itself.

### **2.3.2 Parameters of the Fieldwork**

Living amongst the people of Gambella for a lengthy period of time was not necessary, for I was able to build on my prior four-year relationship with these churches. Writing in the field of educational research, Jeffrey and Troman discuss the difficulties of establishing how long should be spent on fieldwork, suggesting that 'ethnographic projects

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<sup>26</sup> Michael H. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (Orlando: Orlando Academic Press, 1980), pp 50-51.

<sup>27</sup> For ethical validation by the University of Roehampton, see appendix. Hammersley and Atkinson write of the issue of practicability, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, pp. 63-68.



are never finished, only left'.<sup>29</sup> They describe three variations of less intensive ethnographic engagement, the mode of 'compressed time' that I used in preference to the 'selective intermittent' or 'recurrent' time that require further visits. The frame of 'compressed time' is described by Jeffrey and Troman as 'a short period of intense ethnographic research in which researchers inhabit a research site for anything from a few days to a month'.<sup>30</sup> They describe the outcome of such focused research as a 'snapshot in time'.<sup>31</sup> My 'snapshot' was extended by my previous involvement within the life of these churches. Perhaps, more crucially, my focus on the single issue of the use of devised drama actually called for the more concentrated approach of an intense period of fieldwork through workshops rather than the slow immersion of traditional ethnographic practice.

I used a residential-workshop for my investigation and the project manager of the recently opened Anglican Centre in Gambella acted as the sole 'gatekeeper' for my project, playing a fundamental role in its arrangements. The timetable of events in Gambella meant that an eight-day period in December 2011 was the only possibility offered, forming the temporal parameters of the residential workshop, which ran from the late afternoon of Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December until the following Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

The workshop took place at the Anglican Centre in Gambella for largely pragmatic reasons, for as a region of 'continuing unrest, sporadic violence, banditry and inter-tribal clashes' the official advice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office warned against

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<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey and Troman, 'Time for Ethnography', p. 538.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey and Troman, 'Time for Ethnography', p. 538.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 540.

travelling anywhere in the region beyond the town.<sup>32</sup> From a positive point of view, the new buildings provided shaded meeting space, water, food and accommodation, and intermittent electricity. However, the internal space, with its provision of whiteboards and chairs for everyone, made it a very different place from the church compounds where biblical drama would normally take place, either inside, within the half-light of a wattle and daub church, or, and more likely, under the shade of a tree in the compound surrounding the church. Inside or outside, most people would be seated on locally made benches, for the few chairs would be reserved for dignitaries. Yet, the new Anglican Centre in Gambella was appropriate in that it was due to become the place for communal training and meetings, and so also for performance, when drama formed part of such gatherings within the episcopal area.

### **2.3.3 The Participants**

My choice of participants was particularly constrained by my lack of the local languages of the people who make up the Anglican Church of Ethiopia. The decision to work with English-speaking church leaders, who I already knew, was pragmatic, but a choice that had much to commend it, even though it meant that the group would consist only of men. It would have been rewarding to have worked with a group of women of the Mothers' Union, for they, through the paternalism of ethnic tradition and a lack of opportunities for education, remain at the margins of their people, as a margin of the marginalized. However, though there had always been great warmth and a sense of sisterhood between us, they had no English and we could only communicate verbally through male interpreters.

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<sup>32</sup> This was in accord with the ethics committee of the University of Roehampton. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (website), *Foreign Travel Advice: Ethiopia* <<http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ethiopia/>> [accessed 13 October 2011]

Though the standard of English of a group of church leaders would be variable, it would be possible to gather a group with whom I could converse in English. On a more positive note, as leaders of their communities, the men could speak knowledgeably about what drama was in use within their various local churches. They also had the advantage of involvement in the wider episcopal area and were used to working together as members of its leadership team, which made for ease of working relationships during the residential workshop.

In working with the leaders of a church as small as the Anglican Church in Ethiopia, anonymity would have been difficult to establish, for it could not have been guaranteed simply by altering names. In their account of ‘narrative research’, Molly Andrews and her co-authors discuss the problem of anonymity, suggesting that researchers omit or alter data that carries specificity, so ‘guaranteeing confidentiality at the expense of some of the data’s richness’.<sup>33</sup> Had I changed my data in this way it would no longer have so closely belonged to these church leaders with whom I worked in partnership. Consequently, as it held no problematic ethical implications, I sought, and my participants gladly gave their permission to use photographs and their actual names. I consider that this has provided another means by which the men’s contributions are given the justice of value. Within this region, for formal purposes people generally use a triple name, traditionally their own, followed by their father’s and then their grandfather’s ethnic name. For some, however, this is preceded by a baptismal name. Throughout this study, I accord the men formal respect through their triple name for its first use within each chapter, thereafter using their first name, as used throughout the fieldwork.

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<sup>33</sup> Molly Andrews, Corinne Squires and Maria Tamboukou, *Doing Narrative Research* (London: Sage, 2008), p. 51.

The participants came from the two majority ethnic groups of Nuer and Anuak, apart from a Dinka priest who had charge of a Nuer parish that included an Anuak congregation. He was treated and behaved as an honorary Nuer.<sup>34</sup> In many ways the period of the workshop formed a three-way conversation, between me and the two ethnic groups who were my participants. All three parties held some power, but were also in a position of vulnerability.

The participants related to me as someone who was both insider and outsider. As a researcher, I automatically held a position of power, particularly as a white, educated, middle-aged western woman who had previously been their teacher.<sup>35</sup> Yet, though I held the power of the design and facilitation of the project, the group themselves held power in their control over what they chose to share with me (and with each other). As Hammersley and Atkinson correctly stress, the participants within my study were subjects rather than objects and so the stories that they shared were from their own way of seeing, forming their own interpretation of events.<sup>36</sup> As *John's* statement with which I opened this, and the previous chapter, shows, the men had concern with those who lay beyond me: '*Mary* is coming here to learn from us, and to show this understanding to the people in her university'. Beyond the dynamic of what they wanted to share and what they thought that I

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<sup>34</sup> The workshop took place before the present escalation of violence between Nuer and Dinka that is at the root of much of the present troubles in South Sudan. See Madeleine Davies, 'Bishops Hang onto Hope in "Shameful" South Sudan', *Church Times*, 21 August 2015, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (pp. 86-88) quote E. Goffman's study on the effects of the identity of the researcher on data, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959). They also cite C.A.B. Warren and P.K. Rasmussen's observation that a foreign woman is seen as an 'honorary man', commenting that 'this is particularly the case if the researcher is no longer young', 'Sex and Gender in Field Research', *Urban Life*, 6:3 (1977), 349-369.

<sup>36</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, pp. 105, 190.

wanted to hear, and though not present, such an ‘audience’ can be of import in this place where education is both esteemed and desired, and where aid in the form of projects over which they have little if any control comes from non-governmental organizations. Though I had been clear that my fieldwork was a discrete project with no benefits to themselves apart from any gained from their participation, there may have remained an unspoken, even subconscious desire and hope that it could lead to further practical involvement in their lives, churches and communities. The espoused reflections and opinions that they offered were those that seemed appropriate to them during the shared time and place of the workshop. I have to remember that they may not have been those that would be taken back into the operant situation of everyday life in their own local churches.

The participants also had their own issues of power between themselves. Separation, suspicion, competition and even enmity are deeply ingrained in ethnic relationships between the Nuer and the Anuak in the Gambella region, and may erupt at any time.<sup>37</sup> Dereje Feyissa analyses the problem as stemming from their differing world-views, and exacerbated by the steady eastward migration of the Nuer into what the Anuak see as their territory, in part as a result of the Sudanese civil wars. Feyissa juxtaposes two statements, given in interview, that act as a summary of their concerns. The first is from an Anuak civil servant: ‘There will be no Anywaa [Anuak] left in the Gambella region. Nassar was ours. The Nuer took it. [...] Now they want to take Gambella town. Where else should we go? [...] It is their nature to be aggressive. For us the word Nuer mean something bad.’ The second is from a Nuer elder: ‘Why should the Anywaa deny us access to land they do not use? Why do they think the land belongs to them? Land is for *kuoth*

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<sup>37</sup> In February, Grant LeMarquand reported escalating violence in Gambella, such that ‘Nuer and Anuak are not crossing into each other’s parts of town.’ *Bishop Grant and Doctor Wendy* (Blog, February 10, 2016) <<http://www.grantandwendy.com/>> [accessed 10 June 2016]

[God]. [...] The Anywaa are not good people. They want to live alone.’<sup>38</sup> The Anglican Church has a large membership of both ethnic groups and actively encourages collegiality, particularly within its leadership, but also through the annual Local Assembly.<sup>39</sup> Yet, ethnic tensions inevitably still run as undercurrents. The Nuer perhaps held power through having the longest involvement, as well as forming the largest ethnic group within the Anglican Church in Ethiopia, for the ex-Baptist Anuaks were more recent arrivals in the church (about 2004/5). On the other hand, the Anglican Centre in Gambella where we held our workshop is in the Anuak area of the town, and one of my participants held a position of authority there as its Educational Co-ordinator.

I was aware of such issues of power between the participants (including myself) acting as undercurrents throughout my fieldwork. Yet, these were not the only issues of power emanating from my research that I needed to keep in my sight. For largely pragmatic reasons I had chosen to work with the church leaders, and so with those who were in positions of authority within their local churches. These men saw life through the lens of their leadership as well as of their masculinity, and their views are not necessarily the same as those of their congregations. Power was not simply an issue of leadership, for as indicated earlier, in their ability to read and write these men are also not representative of their own congregations. In research that is concerned with orally focused communities it appears somewhat ironic that my conversation could only be with those who are among the most literate. My writing needs to bear witness to these unspoken voices of the Anglican laity who are bound by their own lack of literacy, as well as representing the

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<sup>38</sup> Feyissa, *Playing Different Games*, p. xi.

<sup>39</sup> This may be compared with the *Mekane Yesus* Church (Lutheran) in Gambella that works through two separate synods.

church leaders themselves and their stories and reflections, while also not forgetting my own.

### **2.3.4 The Fieldwork Workshop**

Having decided to use a residential workshop for my investigation, I had both time and the necessity to use mixed methods of engagement, for within such an intense period of work pedagogical considerations suggest that the men would have become disengaged in my project if I had simply approached our topic repetitively through one means. I used two major approaches, dividing each day into two portions. The pattern of what took place within the workshops can be found on page 9.

In the mornings I acted as a participant-observer, facilitating a series of focus group sessions, using open questions to build up a picture of the churches' present use of drama and encouraging reflection on the possibilities carried by drama as a means of biblical engagement, as well as on their present practice. These sessions, planned in process, developed throughout the week, and included dramas devised to illustrate our conversation.<sup>40</sup>

The shorter afternoon session was used for a practical drama project that led to performance. My intention was to have as little involvement as possible in this so that I could make direct observation of the men's own processes at work.<sup>41</sup> Even though the practical drama took place under the somewhat engineered conditions of a research

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<sup>40</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson stress that ethnographic research 'cannot be programmed', for 'its practice is replete with the unexpected', *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> B. Junker maps the range of social roles for fieldwork, from that of complete participant to that of complete observer, *Field Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 36, quoted by Hammersley and Atkinson, p. 93.

workshop it remained a project in which my role was of observation rather than facilitation. It was important that the practical drama project was given freedom to develop without my interference, despite the men choosing to perform dramas from their present tradition, rather than devising new ones.

I had hoped to see freshly devised dramas, and the flexibility of approach that I had taken to the workshop enabled me to see these by adding a third aspect to our work, in the form of asking the men to produce drama in response to the Gospel reading that we heard at Morning Prayer. Subsequently, and only at my request, this was included in the programme of drama on the Sunday afternoon, so going against my own concern for non-interference.

This combination of approaches gave me the opportunity to see examples of the type of drama performed by these churches, and the processes at work when they devised drama in response to a biblical narrative, as well as hearing descriptions and reflections from the practitioners themselves. This forms the triangulation necessary for the mediation between the potential polarities of the practical and the theoretical.<sup>42</sup> Without the practical engagement, the oral conversation may have veered towards bland generalities and the ideals of theoretical principles that the men decided they wanted me to hear.

My fieldwork, presented as a workshop, was viewed by the participant group as a period of ‘training’, for that was often the reason for which they gathered together, and particularly as I had previously taught their scheme of initial theological education. The focus of the research on enabling and empowering participatory biblical engagement gave

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<sup>42</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, pp. 198-200.



my fieldwork a dual purpose that fitted with this view.<sup>43</sup> I sought material for my own research, but through the theological methods of *praxis* intended the design of the fieldwork project to not only feed my research but to also hold possibility for positive impact on the men's own ministry, and so on the life of the Anglican Church in this place.<sup>44</sup> The workshop formed a group investigation in which I took the role of facilitator, aiming to engender a communal sense of engagement with the issues of the project. In an informal manner it followed the *praxis* cycle, beginning with the men's own experience, and encouraging exploration and reflection through my facilitating questions, the men's sharing, and the ensuing discussion.<sup>45</sup> At the close of the workshop I asked the men to reflect on what they would take away with them from the project, offering the opportunity for consideration of possible future practice. Throughout the fieldwork, I looked for the men's reflexive, reflective and critical engagement as well as my own, viewing it as a place of shared conversation where the group took on the role of local theologians who might become more reflective practitioners of their Bible-based drama.<sup>46</sup> Though it was not possible to include participation beyond the period of the residential project within the design and analysis of the research, this would perhaps have been more in the manner of paying lip-service to methods of participatory research, for it was the workshop itself that held the open possibilities of empowerment for the participants within the research.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson write of the value of ensuring that the fieldworker 'has something to give' so that she is not 'an exploitative interloper', p. 81.

<sup>44</sup> See for instance, Judith Thompson, *Theological Reflection* (London: SCM, 2008); and Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, "Theology-in-Action": Praxis', in *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005), pp. 170-199.

<sup>45</sup> The central two terms of these cycles vary from practitioner to practitioner. Here, I follow Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 85-86.

<sup>46</sup> Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, pp. 16-20.

<sup>47</sup> In contrast, Swinton and Mowat write of involvement in the totality of the project as *the* method of participatory research, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 228.

The challenge of working with two language groups and a range of ability in English meant that language remained an issue throughout the workshop. I devised strategies to facilitate the participants' full engagement, while at the same time enabling my own understanding. Brief introductions led to questions for the men to discuss in language groups, providing an initial freedom of engagement in the vernacular, so enabling the full contribution of those with less English. This was followed by a time of sharing and conversation of further reflection using English. The transcripts of these sessions indicate that not all voices are represented equally, for it is those with the better English who could converse more freely. The unexpected advantage of this approach of working in separate language groups was that we heard the contrasting approaches of the two ethnic groups, with their differing ecclesial and cultural backgrounds, and this encouraged a greater reflexivity between us all. At the end of the workshop *Michael Anyar Garang*, reflected on the way that he had learnt through this process of sharing: 'When we come together we learn from each other's experience. I have my experience, you have your experience of doing drama – and when we come together, we learn, we share our experience.' It was a sign that the men had not discussed their use of drama before and that *Michael*, at least, had found it a useful engagement for himself, and not just for my research.

### **2.3.5 Interpreting Gambella**

Throughout the workshop my note-taking and journaling were supplemented by sound recording and photography. Focus-group sessions are un-repeatable events, and the combination of the tasks of listening, making sense of the men's English and facilitating the sessions were sometimes detrimental to the depth of my immediate reflection on what

was taking place.<sup>48</sup> Subsequent listening to the taped conversations has often revealed much that I was not aware of at the time. There was also a tension between combining focused observation of dramas with the need to take photographs. Direct observation enabled a greater engagement in the immediacy of the event and treated the men less as guinea-pigs under a microscope. This however was to the detriment of the photographic and written record carried away from the event.<sup>49</sup> Though not as extensive as I wish, I did arrive home with data, and my transcriptions have since rendered most of the sound recordings intelligible.

The transcriptions, supplemented by photographs, journal and a necessary but cautioned use of memory have allowed me to reflect further on what I experienced during the period of fieldwork.<sup>50</sup> Careful listening and reading of transcripts through an informal use of discourse analysis has enabled engagement with the men's stories and reflections, and to the ways in which our conversation together developed.<sup>51</sup> One man's reflection often led to someone else's story, and so on to someone else's as they supplemented each other's thinking, memories and reflections, enabling me to build up a picture of the way that these churches use drama. The transcripts have allowed me to reflect on the men's own reflective insight into the use and possibilities of devised biblical drama.

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<sup>48</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson insist that 'one should be constantly on the alert, with more than half an eye on the research possibilities', *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, p. 103.

<sup>49</sup> Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro shares similar frustrations, at problems of recording her 'Festival on Ruth' and also noting that she has had to use her memories to build her account. This festival will be further discussed in chapter four. *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson discuss the limitations of memory and also the propensity to distort it 'in line with emerging theory', p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 574-87.

My research has been inspired by a Ricoeurian account of hermeneutics, and Hammersley and Atkinson's account of 'progressive focusing' that moves between description and 'developing and testing explanations' bears resemblance to Ricoeur's 'hermeneutical arc' with its oscillating movement between explanation and understanding.<sup>52</sup> Corinne Squires points to the difficulty faced by researchers in interpreting situations that are other than their own, for 'we are always powerfully limited in story understanding'.<sup>53</sup> Imaginative engagement has enabled the world of my 'text' (of Gambella and my research data) to interact with my own world and theological context. The purpose of my qualitative analysis is to move from the naïve understanding of my earlier experience of drama in Gambella, through unfolding the experience and data of the fieldwork, in relationship with both hermeneutical theory and drama and performance theory towards making interpretative wagers that seek to make sense of the devised biblical drama in this place. I can make interpretative wagers of possibility; I cannot make a definitive interpretation, for we work in a situation of multiple possible interpretations, particularly as it is not my own story that I am telling and interpreting.<sup>54</sup>

My thesis is not just *my* account of the drama of Gambella, for it must be formed with the research participants at the front of my mind. Ricoeur reminds us that narrative is a means by which people construct and interpret their world, and so create their own identity.<sup>55</sup> It remains imperative for this research that the voices, conversations, reflections and stories that I heard during my fieldwork are used and reflected in this interpretative

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<sup>52</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, p. 175. For Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc, see chapter six.

<sup>53</sup> Andrews, Squires, and Tamboukou, *Doing Narrative Research*, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> Squires writes of a need for sensitive reflexivity on the part of the researcher when interpreting other people's stories, *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.20-33 (p. 32).

account, for as *John* maintained, I came to learn from them that I might show their understanding to the people of my university, for ‘they have to read our understanding’. It is only in the light of the Anglicans of Gambella’s own espoused self-understanding (and as necessarily interpreted by myself) that I can reflect further on what value devised biblical drama may have within a wider setting.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has completed the work begun in the last chapter of charting the methodological conversation of this research that seeks to bring practice and theory, the orally focused and the scholar into dialogue. In the last chapter, I considered the scholarly conversation partners who are here brought together within the field of ordinary biblical hermeneutics. In this chapter I have given a reflexive account of the contextual relationships between the world of Gambella and my own subjectivity. Brought together for the purposes of investigating devised biblical drama, I have introduced my ethnographic approach to the fieldwork that lies behind much of this research. The next two chapters of this introductory section also consider the context of the research, firstly, with a closer investigation of my concern at the difficulties of biblical engagement faced by orally focused Anglicans within the global world of the Anglican Communion and its recent report on the use of the Bible that appears to assume the literacy of its members. Secondly, I investigate the possibility of devised drama as an accessible approach to Scripture, through a literature review of sub-Saharan African biblical scholarship’s concern with ordinary orally focused ‘readers’ that occasionally shows interest in biblical drama.

## Chapter Three

### Participating Together in the Dialogue of Scripture:

#### ‘The Bible in the Life of the Church’ and Orally Focused Anglicans

I see this project as utterly foundational for our life *together*: I can hardly stress that enough. It raises some fundamental questions that we *share*: What place does Scripture have in our life *together*? How do we engage with and interpret what we read in its pages? *Do we understand how others in the Communion, often because their context is different from our own, do this? Can their context and perspectives be a gift to mine?* In exploring some of these questions – *together* - I am convinced that our appreciation of the Bible may be transformed and enriched.

(Justin Welby on the *Bible in the Life of the Church* Project)<sup>1</sup>

And when they come *together*, we learn from each other’s experience. I have my experience, you have your experience of doing drama – and when we come *together*, we learn, we *share* our experience. You come with what you have and we *share* it together.

(Michael Anyar Garang)<sup>2</sup>

I have voiced my concern for orally focused Christians in participating in the invitation of Scripture to inhabit its proposed worlds, and I have introduced the methodology behind my resultant research. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the place of the orally focused Anglican within the world of the wider Anglican Communion, through an investigation of its *Bible in the Life of the Church* project with its concern for a

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Welby (my emphases), in Anglican Communion, ‘Theology’ (Bible in the Life of the Church Project), *Mission* <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> [accessed 3December 2015]

<sup>2</sup> Focus group, second Monday, December 2011.

collaborative unity in diversity. Both Justin Welby, as Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking at the launch of the second phase of this Anglican project (2013), and *Michael Anyar*, speaking at the close of the drama workshop that formed my fieldwork project, make impassioned calls for working *together* and *sharing*. The Archbishop has the breadth of the Anglican Communion in mind, while *Michael* speaks of the more localized diversity, particularly apparent within the Anglican churches of Gambella in its multi-ethnicity. Both speakers are concerned with togetherness rather than merger, as they seek to reach across the contextual borders that separate membership within the Church. Their plea beckons beyond telling and listening to those who are our fraternal ‘other’, for sharing suggests a depth of enriching participation and engagement in the experience of the encounter.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter is written in the wake of and in response to the publication of the report of the first phase of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project (November 2012) that sought to explore ‘in some depth the way we go about this engagement with and interpretation of Scripture’.<sup>4</sup> Concerned with operant as well as espoused and normative voices, the report noted ‘evidence of “gaps” between what might be called the “received wisdom” of the Church in relation to our engagement with and interpretation of Scripture

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<sup>3</sup> I use ‘our’ to include myself alongside those being discussed, generally as Anglican or more broadly as Christian and sometimes as a participant within my involvement in Gambella. I do not assume that the reader will want to so situate themselves, apart from where I intend ‘our’ to refer to humanity as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter BILC, Anglican Communion, *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery*: Report of the Anglican Communion “Bible in the Life of the Church” Project (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2012), p. 3. The second phase of the project (2012-2016) seeks to develop the work begun in the first phase: encouraging Anglican engagement with Scripture through increased educational resources, developing ‘reading’ links across the Communion, and through exploration of the Anglican heritage and its contemporary differing perspectives on Scripture.

<<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

and what actually happens in practice’.<sup>5</sup> Using their work as a basis, I firstly, investigate the ‘received wisdom’ of Anglican perception of Scripture as authoritative and normative revelation, before secondly, turning to ‘what actually happens in practice’ within the specificity of the orally focused context of the Anglican churches of Gambella. Thirdly, in development of the gap noted in the report between ‘the academy and the pew’, I consider more specifically that between the literate and the orally focused. It was the context of the Anglican churches in Gambella that formed my response to the first phase of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project, for despite the project’s avowed desire to reach the ‘grass roots’, its design and its assumptions of literacy and availability of Bibles had meant that it could not readily engage with those from orally focused communities.<sup>6</sup> Such churches, seemingly inevitably, form the margins of the Anglican Communion.

The report at the end of the project’s first phase celebrated the breadth of the Anglican Communion, reporting on the ‘wonderful diversity of ways of what “engaging with and interpreting Scripture” looks like, noting that ‘the context in which the engagement takes place generates further diversity in the approach to and application of Scripture’.<sup>7</sup> The report sought to cross borders within the shared work of the project as it brought together offerings from many regions within the Communion. However, it was less celebratory in the attention it drew to its ‘evidence of “gaps” between “received wisdom” and ‘practice’. Perhaps the Communion is better at celebrating its diversity of ethnicity than it is at dealing with its more problematic areas of difference. They

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<sup>5</sup> BILC, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Lyon (Project Administrator), Anglican Communion News Service, “The Bible in the life of the Church” Project Launched by the Anglican Communion (28 January 2010), *Archive* (2015) <<http://www.anglicannews.org/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>7</sup> BILC, p. 10



specifically drew attention to the gap already noted, ‘between the “academy” and the “pew”, between the “scholar” and the “ordinary Christian”’.<sup>8</sup>

Archbishop Welby and *Michael Anyar* suggest that the contexts and perspectives of the ‘other’ have something to offer our own, and that through sharing, the gap may be narrowed, as ‘together’ we discern the gifts that each has to offer to enhance the life of the other. The report poses the question: ‘How do we draw on the insights of the academy or scholar in a way that those in the pew both understand and are enriched in their Christian living?’<sup>9</sup> If there is to be a true sharing, the converse must be posed as to whether there are insights from the world-of-the-ordinary-Christian that may offer ‘understanding and enrichment’ to those in the academy. My concern is particularly with the gap between the orally focused and the assumptions of literacy of the rest of the Church, including its academic sector. I seek for the gifts that may be offered by this world-of-the-church-bench to enrich the life of the wider Church.

### 3.1 Scripture in the Life of the Anglican Church

Beyond its insistence on Scripture containing ‘all things necessary to salvation’ and so holding a central place in its life, the Anglican Communion has no further formalised account of its doctrine of Scripture, which is carried instead in a variety of statements within its official reports.<sup>10</sup> Within the foreword of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* report, Rowan Williams, in his role as Archbishop of Canterbury, re-affirmed the

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<sup>8</sup> BILC, pp. 10-11

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Article V1, ‘39 Articles of Religion’, *Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), p. 613. Anglican Communion documents on Scripture have been gathered by BILC (Additional Material): ‘What the Anglican Communion has said about the Bible 1: Extracts from official and semi-official Anglican Communion Documents’ <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> [accessed 3December 2015]

confessional nature of Scripture as authoritative: ‘Anglicans have consistently given Scripture the supreme role of deciding the limits of what can and must be believed’, and also normative: ‘they have tried to listen to Scripture in the expectation of being converted and transformed by the Spirit whose action underlies the words on the page.’<sup>11</sup> Scripture’s authority is based upon its nature as revelation, and the Archbishop describes the Anglican Communion as ‘a community, therefore, in which what the Church thinks or does is always being tested and judged *in the light of what God says to his people* in the Scriptural record of his historical dealings with them’.<sup>12</sup> The espoused view of the contemporary Anglican Church and the formal view of scholars of theological interpretation are in accord, as willing heirs of the normative view of tradition. How this works out in the dramatized scriptural interpretation of a local orally focused community is an issue addressed throughout the following two parts of this thesis.

The Archbishop adds a word of caution to this perception of Scripture as authoritative and normative revelation, reminding the report’s readers that a faithful relationship with Scripture cannot be a simplistic ‘way of theology which has imagined that we can solve every issue by appealing to the plain words of the Bible and no more’.<sup>13</sup> Instead, and as he suggests is in line with mainstream Reformation thought, he calls for faithful readers to be trained ‘in *a discerning reading* that dr[aws] on the history of interpretation and the *intelligence of the whole community*’.<sup>14</sup> Williams could have in mind a scholarly interpretative community working at the forefront of the Church’s biblical interpretation within the stream of tradition. However, his description of faithful readership as communal rather than individual within the fellowship of the whole church community,

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<sup>11</sup> Rowan Williams (my emphases), ‘Foreword’, BILC, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

past and present, broadens the inclusivity of ‘the intelligence of the whole community’, for he proposes that the interpretation of Scripture should take place, ‘in company with believers of every age and place, and bringing to bear on their reading the *perspectives and skills of their human culture*’.<sup>15</sup> Such a view suggests that there may be more methods of displaying intelligence than the scholarly, since everyone within the Church has something to offer and share within the conversation of the diversity of the ‘perspectives and skills’ of the many types of community that make up the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Communion has churches in every continent of the world. As a result of its history it has become a Church that seeks to tread a *via media*, covering a range of theological traditions as well as its differing geographical contexts, for its unity is through episcopal provincial collegiality rather than hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> As I have demonstrated, its geographical and socio-economic spread means that its members include the orally focused and the non-literate as well as the literate. Encompassing its range of membership, the Church seeks to be a comprehensive and inclusive unity in diversity with Scripture at its centre, as affirmed in the Communion’s Windsor Report (2004) to which the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project was an official response: ‘Our shared reading of scripture across boundaries of culture, region and tradition ought to be the central feature of our common life, guiding us together into an appropriately rich and diverse unity.’<sup>17</sup> Sharing across such

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, BILC, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief history, see for instance, Kevin Ward, ‘The Development of Anglicanism as a Global Communion’, in *Anglicanism: A Global Communion*, ed. by Andrew Wingate and others (London: Mowbray: 1998), pp. 13-22. For Anglican principles of *via media*, see, for instance, Alan Bartlett, ‘No Monopolies Here’: the Balancing Dialogues of Anglicanism’, in *A Passionate Balance: the Anglican Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007), pp. 31-63 (particularly pp. 51-56).

<sup>17</sup> Hereafter Windsor, Anglican Communion, ‘Scripture and Interpretation’, *The Lambeth Commission on Communion: The Windsor Report* (2004), Section B53-62 (62)  
<<http://anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

diversity, as Williams insists, needs to affirm and use the ‘perspectives and skills’ of all. However, the Communion has found this easier to call for than to practice.

When Scripture is viewed as revealed, authoritative and normative for a community it offers potential to be a uniting force across its parts as an agent of the Church’s catholicity. The Windsor Report described this potential as an imperative: ‘as the Spirit inspired Scripture, we should expect that the bible would be a means of unity, not division’.<sup>18</sup> That it has not done so across the Anglican Communion testifies to Williams’ caution at imagining that ‘we can solve every issue by appealing to the plain words of the Bible and no more’.<sup>19</sup> On contemporary topics that have proved divisive for the Anglican Communion, such as the ethical issue of understandings of human sexuality and the ecclesial one of priesthood and episcopacy, all voices in the debates perceive Scripture as crucial in aiding understanding, but their results lead in polarized directions.<sup>20</sup> The Windsor Report laments that even ‘a mention of Scripture today can sometimes seem actually divisive, so aware are we of the bewildering range of available interpretative strategies and results’.<sup>21</sup>

For the Communion this has been a problem exacerbated by the determination of many interpreters of Scripture to find *the* truth. Where communities see the text of Scripture as a puzzle containing single and closed meaning that may be deciphered, it becomes tempting to view one’s own interpretation as correct and true (especially if one is

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<sup>18</sup> Windsor, B62.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, BILC, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Introduction’, BILC, p. 3. The Windsor Process was not set up to judge the issue of understandings of human sexuality, but to consider the ‘ways in which communion and understanding could be enhanced where serious differences threatened the life of a diverse worldwide Church’, Robin Eames, ‘Foreword’, Windsor, p 5.

<sup>21</sup> Windsor, B62.

in a position of ecclesial or scholarly authority), while the different one of one's neighbour is misinterpretation and so false.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, one could view one's own interpretation as inferior and potentially wrong in comparison with that of better educated or more powerful scholars or clergy. This facet of human nature is an active force despite the fact that the Anglican Communion has from its inception seen itself as a broad church that seeks to hold its people carrying multiple viewpoints together.<sup>23</sup> The Windsor Report mourned as 'tragic' the deep divisions within the communion over ethical beliefs and organizational practice that had been fed by variant readings of Scripture.<sup>24</sup>

Responding to the deep divisions that have resulted from multiple interpretation of Scripture within the Anglican Communion, the Anglican report *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (2008), citing the history of interpretation as evidence, affirms that biblical text has an inherently under-determined nature, for 'any expectation that interpretations of Scripture will ever be totally uncontested is discounted by the experience of history, if not the very character of the Bible itself'.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the resultant tensions within the Church, many contemporary theological interpreters proclaim and celebrate such an 'underdetermined' view of the nature of Scripture as a positive God-given attribute,

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Lyon makes a similar point in 'It's not just what we do, it's the way that we do it', *The Reader* 110:3 (Autumn 2013), 20-21 (p. 20).

<sup>23</sup> Cranmer (retained in 1662, 'Concerning the Service of the Church') discussed the holding together of those who were 'so addicted to their old customs' with those who are 'so new-fangled, that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old'. The opening sentence of the 1662 'Preface' also affirms this *via media*: 'It hath been the wisdom of the Church of England, ever since the first compiling of her Publick Liturgy, to keep the mean between the two extremes'. *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. v, ix.

<sup>24</sup> Windsor, B62.

<sup>25</sup> Anglican Communion, *Communion, Conflict and Hope: The Kuala Lumpur Report of the Third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2008), Part III (para 69)

<<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

described by the Anglican scholar A.K.M. Adam as the ‘divine abundance of semiosis’.<sup>26</sup> Such a perception has an ancient provenance in Augustine’s writing, ‘Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same words in several ways, all of them deriving confirmation from other no less divinely inspired passages?’<sup>27</sup>

When Scripture is accepted as having an under-determined nature it calls for fresh attitudes to making and ‘reading’ interpretation. Where there are both many possible meanings and contesting voices within Scripture one’s own interpretation can only ever be provisional for there will always be other viewpoints, and there will always be more to be gleaned. Interpretation, therefore, calls for dialogue and an attitude of humility, for no one ever has the last word, which rightly remains with the God who inspired Scripture and who inspires its interpretation, but who cannot be domesticated and contained by our own attempts at making sense. In line with Adam and Augustine, and my experience of reading Micah, I perceive indeterminacy as a gift of God as well as of the postmodern age, and as only waiting to be received as such by the ‘readers’ of Scripture of the post-Enlightenment Anglican Church.

The broad church that is the Anglican Communion has been experiencing internal theological, ethical and ecclesial divisions throughout the first years of the twenty-first century that have been made more acute due to diverse, but uncompromising ways of

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<sup>26</sup> A.K.M. Adam, ‘Poaching on Zion: Biblical Theology as Signifying Practice’, in *Reading Scripture with the Church*, by A.K.M. Adam and others (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 17-34 (pp. 18, 24). See also, Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds, ‘Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture’, in *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 1-5 (p. 3); Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), pp. 56-61.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. and ed. by R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.85 (3.27.38), p. 87.

interpreting Scripture. The Windsor Report written in response to its internal tensions yearned for a fresh approach to Scripture: ‘We need [...] *a joint commitment* to hearing and obeying *God* as he speaks in scripture, to discovering more of the *Jesus Christ* to whom all authority is committed, and to being *open to the fresh wind of the Spirit* who inspired scripture in the first place.’<sup>28</sup> Present fragmentation demands such a communal and Trinitarian foundation of renewed, open and expectant engagement with Scripture throughout the whole Communion, and offered a fresh challenge: ‘If our present difficulties force us to read and learn *together* from scripture in new ways, they will not have been without profit.’<sup>29</sup> The Windsor Report called for the Anglican Communion ‘to re-evaluate the ways in which we have read, heard, studied and digested scripture’ and the resultant *Bible in the Life of the Church* project, in answer to their call for the Church to ‘read and learn together’ sought to involve representatives from the whole Communion, from the ‘grass roots as well as scholars’.<sup>30</sup>

### **3.2 Hearing Scripture in Gambella: an Orally Focused ‘Grass Roots’ Church**

Sunday by Sunday the sentence, ‘This is the word of the Lord’ is proclaimed in countless different languages in Anglican churches across the world, an affirmation of faith in Scripture’s revelatory nature.<sup>31</sup> However, despite this insistence and the desire of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project for inclusivity, Anglicans from orally focused communities face practical issues that create problems for their engagement with Scripture, as can be found within the following ‘contextual review’ of the Anglican churches in Gambella:

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<sup>28</sup> Windsor, B61, my emphases.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Windsor, B62; Stephen Lyon, Anglican Communion News Service (28 January 2010) <<http://www.anglicannews.org/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>31</sup> This phrase closes Old and New Testament readings.

The church leaders feel strongly challenged by the *lack of education for themselves and of the congregation*. They would like the church-goers to be *able to read the Bible for themselves and in their own language*. There is a *lack of Bibles* in the local language, as well as blackboards for teaching. *Women are often illiterate* and indicated that reading and writing would assist them immensely.<sup>32</sup>

Teaching a course of initial theological education (2006-2009) to a group of tutors, who subsequently taught within their Mission Centres, I became acutely aware of the practical problem of accessing Scripture in this place (see figure 3.1, below).<sup>33</sup> Only the two major ethnic groupings had Scripture in their own tongue, the Nuer having a complete Bible and the Anuak having the New Testament (but in the Amharic script that is no longer in use for writing this language).<sup>34</sup> Though there is a Dinka New Testament no church had a copy (2006/09), while a few had the Dinka translation of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1906) that includes New Testament readings for each Sunday, though I was told that even this is in ‘the wrong dialect for us’. At this time there was no written form of the language of the Opo.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Elvia van den Berg (my emphases), ‘Contextual Analysis of the Gambella Region: for the Anglican Church in Ethiopia’ (unpublished report, Sunkuri Consult, May 2006), p. 9, used with permission.

<sup>33</sup> For further on this course, see chapter two.

<sup>34</sup> This was the situation as I experienced it. The complete Anuak Bible (Latin script) was published in 2013, LeMarquand (July 2013). <<http://www.grantandwendy.com/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>35</sup> In 2008/09, the Opo participated in a project translating the Holy Communion service into the different languages of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia. They chose to use the Nuer variant of the Latin alphabet for this first writing of their language. In September 2013, an Opo and a Nuer priest were appointed to translate the gospel of Mark from Nuer into Opo. LeMarquand (September 2013).



<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Evangelization and Approximate date of entry into Anglican Church in Ethiopia (ACE)</b>	<b>‘Availability’ of Vernacular Bible, as in 2006/9 (with later information)</b>
Nuer	American Presbyterian Church (from mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century) ACE from about 1994	Complete Bible
Anuak	American Bethel Baptist Church (from mid-20 <sup>th</sup> century) ACE from 2004/2005	New Testament in Ethiopian script: Anuak currently uses Latin alphabet (2013: Full Bible in Latin alphabet)
Dinka	Church Mission Society (Anglican) (from early 20 <sup>th</sup> century) ACE from about 1994	New Testament (rare) <i>Book of Common Prayer</i> , with New Testament readings for Sundays (trans. 1906): ‘wrong dialect for us’
Opo	Itang parish, Anglican Church in Ethiopia - from 2004/2005	No written form of language 2008/9: first use of written language through ACE project to translate Service of Holy Communion (2013: Translation of Gospel of Mark from Nuer into Opo by priests of Anglican Church in Ethiopia)

Figure 3.1 Evangelization and Bibles for major Ethnic Groups within ACE

It was always difficult (nearly impossible) to obtain Bibles in any of the appropriate languages, for it was reliant on the uncertain timing of someone from SIM (Serving in Mission) making a rare visit to one of the refugee camps with Bibles for sale in the right language, in conjunction with the appropriate church leader having sufficient money to purchase them. It was easier to provide Bibles in English, but these can only be read by the fortunate few who have received the necessary education and experience in using this foreign language. Indeed, even vernacular Bibles can only be read by those who have received sufficient schooling.<sup>36</sup> Very few had received education through to Grade Twelve (entrance level for University Education), indeed it was a privileged minority who had reached Grade Ten, and many of the church leaders had not progressed beyond primary

<sup>36</sup> van den Berg gives educational statistics for Gambella. Primary school enrolment: 89% (boys), 54% (girls); secondary level enrolment: 46% (boys), 10% (girls); drop-out rate: 30% (boys) 48% (girls), ‘Contextual Analysis’, p. 8.

education. Gambella necessarily remains at its heart an orally focused community where Scripture is heard more often than read.

The Mothers' Union in Gambella is vibrant and strong. In church on Sundays their choir sings, but Scripture will be read aloud by the men who have received the most schooling. The women listen. It can be no other way. For the majority of women in this place, and also a good proportion of the men, the text of the Bible remains locked in a meaningless code of black squiggles, until it is read aloud. Despite the very practical problems of the availability and accessibility of the Bible, Scripture is read, to the few each day at Morning Prayer and to the whole church community each Sunday. In churches without a vernacular Bible, the reader uses an English or Nuer Bible and translates it extemporaneously, or through the medium of story-telling.<sup>37</sup> The reading is then expounded by the preacher.

More typical than studying, reading or telling the Bible are the choirs and the communal singing of vernacular hymns that are known and loved by everyone. Scripture remains key, for the church leaders deem it as a necessity that their songs use both phrases and teaching from Scripture. The Nuer follow the Anglican lectionary and it is the task of the choir leader each week to choose hymns that fit with the Sunday readings, for 'Bible and hymn book are joining together in our church'.<sup>38</sup> In these churches singing may be seen as a primary carrier of the Christian tradition, for this is where the whole congregation

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<sup>37</sup> LeMarquand (July 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Focus group, Saturday.

are directly and fully engaged, enabling the Ricoeurian proposed worlds of the hymns to be encountered, embraced and appropriated.<sup>39</sup>

In Gambella, there is a palpable eagerness for Scripture coupled with a desire for greater understanding, but it is one that is always frustrated by problems of resources and literacy. In the perception of the church leaders of Gambella education is the greatest requirement, expounded in the contextual report as already quoted, and by *John Gach Dak* during my fieldwork: ‘We need somebody who will be so well educated to explain things by themselves, not, no need of translators’, and again: ‘For how long have we Anglicans been waiting for our education? [...] Yes, even those development people will not bring us anything.’<sup>40</sup> They seek education for themselves as well as for their congregations, as they strive for the whole body of Christ in this place to be able to engage more confidently with the biblical text. In the meantime, the text remains in the hands of the best educated, of those who can read. Yet, there is also a sense that for these leaders seeking theological education, the text still remains in the hands of the professionals who have received such education, but who are absent and far away, for the ability to read is not seen as enough to unfold what is held within the pages of Scripture, for it still requires the interpretative work of ‘explaining’ and understanding.

The church leaders of Gambella have been led to look for monovalent, ‘correct’ ways of understanding Scripture by both their educational and ecclesial backgrounds. Their secular education is from a system that is built upon Western roots in the Enlightenment as well as of its own lack of means. It works with large classes, rote-learning and right and

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<sup>39</sup> See also Ellen F. Davis, ‘The Bible in the Life of the Sudanese Church’, in *The Bible in the Life of the Church*, ed. by Clare Amos (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2013), pp. 73-87 (p. 86).

<sup>40</sup> van den Berg, ‘Contextual Analysis’, p. 9.

wrong answers, as in the Grade Twelve Certificate of Education of Ethiopia that uses multiple-choice questioning for its pre-university examinations. Such an educational system, using what Paulo Freire would describe as a ‘banking style’ of pedagogy, leads its recipients to look for single ‘correct’ ways of understanding texts.<sup>41</sup>

Their Protestant missionary roots, also a product of the post-Enlightenment West offered a rational and literal mono-valent understanding of the Bible, creating a concern for ‘correct’ understanding, as *John* explained: ‘We need to be very careful in explaining [...] the meaning in the Bible.’<sup>42</sup> Such concern for correct interpretation leads to expectation that the task of theological education is to provide further deposits within the bank of knowledge that can be passed on to others who have less knowledge.<sup>43</sup> In the terms of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* report, the fruits of biblical interpretation are sought rather than the tools with which to grow them, and yet such tools could liberate them from reliance on the scholar who is absent in person, as well as in accessible or even available textual form.<sup>44</sup>

The method of teaching in Gambella can be seen as in contrast to Elochukwu Uzukwu’s description of the more indigenous sharing of an ‘African “palaver”, that he describes as ‘the liberation of speech at all levels of community in order to come close to that Word which is too large for an individual mouth’.<sup>45</sup> He suggests that within such meetings all are encouraged to share their views on the topic under discussion in a

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<sup>41</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972), pp. 45-46.

<sup>42</sup> Focus group, second Monday.

<sup>43</sup> Freire, p. 46.

<sup>44</sup> BILC project noted this gap between ‘the fruits of our engagement’ and the ‘process of that engagement’ as well as between ‘the academy and the pew’, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1996), p. 128.

developing pattern of speaking and listening that ends when the chief makes the final summing-up, and gives a decision that has taken account of all that has been spoken, as well as of his own knowledge and thought. Uzuoku comments: 'He has the last word because he speaks after having assimilated and digested the Word in the community.'<sup>46</sup> Attending church meetings in Gambella that followed such a consensual pattern, I noticed that everyone present participated in slowly building up a communal 'sense of the meeting', after which the Bishop gave his summary and final word.<sup>47</sup> Yet, during sessions on 'teaching' for tutors within the TEE project, all the tutors had remarked in surprise at encountering my dialogical and open method of teaching, that was more akin to Uzuoku's *palaver* and Freire's 'liberating education' than the banking of deposits of knowledge that they had expected.<sup>48</sup> My tutors flourished, and were enthusiastic within the participative framework. Yet, one student voiced concern, 'You know, *Mary*, this is very good for us, we your tutors, but those people that we teach, they need strong teaching.' He had enjoyed, but not caught my Freirian principles. The question must be asked: was my method of teaching an unintended instance of Western cultural hegemony, or does Uzuoku's description of *palaver* suggest that my students' expectation of formal learning and teaching is rather a more overtly colonial hegemonic pattern that had been accepted as their own?

This concern for correct interpretation is echoed within Jo Bailey Wells' experience in facilitating Bible study in South Sudan, inviting the same question. In her report for the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project, she comments, 'I felt some resistance to the small

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<sup>46</sup> Uzuoku, p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> This Quaker term for dialogical decision making seems apt here.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Witts, 'Theological Education by Extension: February 2006 – January 2009: Report for Course Review' (unpublished report, Anglican Church in Ethiopia, February 2009), p. 7, used with permission.

group/open sharing even among the theological educators; they wanted me to give the “right” answers to the questions I had set for the groups.’<sup>49</sup> That was the expected means of teaching, as was indicated when the principal of a Bible Training Institute in Khartoum commented: ‘Most of us stand in front of our students and pour out information like water into empty cups. But you started drawing out what was already in our minds; now I realize that I need to work with what is already in the minds of my students.’<sup>50</sup> He had not only caught the essence of Freire’s contrasting pedagogies, for despite his surprise that matched that of my students, he seems to perceive its liberative value. In addition to Uzukwu’s insistence that participatory dialogue is a more indigenous approach to life, this experience that accords with my own, encourages more experience-centred methods of learning that may be embraced and appropriated within life.

### **3.3 Gaps: ‘Academy and Pew’, the Literate and the Orally Focused**

The *Bible in the Life of the Church* report is concerned at a ‘gap between the academy and the pew’.<sup>51</sup> In addition, I have perceived one between literate and orally focused communities. Within this situation of concern, the Anglican Church seeks inclusivity within its conversation of and on biblical interpretation. The Windsor Report (2004) called for shared reading ‘across boundaries of culture, region and tradition’. The *Bible in the Life of the Church* project (2010) sought to include ‘the grass roots as well as scholars’. In the project report (2012), Archbishop Williams called for ‘the intelligence of the whole community’ to be included in the ‘discerning reading’ of the Communion. In introducing the second phase of the project (2014-6), Archbishop Welby called for the church to work ‘together’ to explore the questions raised by the first phase. Yet, despite this call for shared

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<sup>49</sup> Davis, ‘Bible in Life of Sudanese Church’, p. 77.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>51</sup> BILC, p. 11.

‘reading’, many ordinary Christians struggle to join in that interpretative conversation of the Church, and as I have demonstrated orally focused communities face particular difficulties in such engagement. Both the former Archbishop of Canterbury and the church leaders of Gambella call for training to enable enhancement and wider participation in biblical interpretation.

The Anglican Communion considers ‘reader’ formation as the task of the Church. Stephen Fowl, an influential proponent of scholarly theological interpretation, agrees, insisting that being formed to read Scripture theologically is not for a select few and is not governed by intellectual abilities alone, ‘rather it is incumbent upon all Christians’.<sup>52</sup> For Fowl it is the academy that has much to teach the Church in the ways of forming ‘wise readers’, for ‘the profession [...] still does a much better job of forming its readers to read in particular ways than the church currently seems to do’.<sup>53</sup> He appears to suggest that the task of the ordinary Christian is of the same nature as that of the scholarly theological interpreter, so providing particular problems for the orally focused.

Several of the documents of the Anglican Church take a similar stance to Fowl. Among the resolutions of the 1998 Lambeth Conference is the insistence that scriptural interpretation should ‘build upon our best traditions and scholarship’, and that the Church should ‘promote at every level biblical study programmes which can inform and nourish the life of dioceses, congregations, seminaries, communities, and *members of all ages*’.<sup>54</sup>

The Windsor Report similarly argues that ‘it is the responsibility of the whole Church to

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<sup>52</sup> Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, p. 189.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Anglican Communion, ‘Called to be Faithful in a Plural World: The Bible’ (Resolution 3:1, b, c), *Lambeth Conference Resolutions Archive*, 1998 (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005) <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

engage with the Bible together; within that, each individual Christian, *to the fullest extent of which they are capable*, must study it and learn from it, thoughtfully and prayerfully'.<sup>55</sup>

In parallel with Cranmer's concern for holistic edification of 'the heart, soul and mind' the Anglican Church has a long history of emphasis on an intellectual approach to its faith. Enshrined within Richard Hooker's late sixteenth century triad of Scripture, Tradition and *Reason*, the interplay between them is denoted as the 'classic Anglican way of viewing and approaching Scripture'.<sup>56</sup> The ordinary Anglican is asked to engage in the same 'reasonable' manner as the scholar, 'to the fullest extent of which they are capable'. The implicit suggestion is that the critical interpretation of scholarship is the best way of engaging with Scripture, as long as this is tempered by the confessional and prayerful approach of theological interpretation. Where does this leave the orally focused Christian?

This assumption of 'reasoned' approaches to Scripture through Bible-study and discussion was implicit in the way that the first phase of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project was set up. Its primary aim was to 'explore how we, as Anglicans actually use the Bible by sharing experiences of using the Bible to explore two major contemporary issues'.<sup>57</sup> Case-studies were produced and groups using them were asked to reflect and report on how they used Scripture. Produced to enable churches throughout the Anglican Communion to participate in the project, the case-studies were prescriptive in their task, providing core texts and sets of questions to aid engagement with the passages. Closed in

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<sup>55</sup> Windsor (my emphasis), B57.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: A Critical Edition with Modern Spelling*, ed. by Arthur Stephen McGrade (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); BILC (extra material), Theme 9, 'What the Anglican Communion has said about the Bible II' <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> (p. 5) [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>57</sup> BILC, p. 3. Two of the five Anglican Marks of mission were used: integrity of creation, transformation of unjust structures of society <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]



its task, they sought to be fully open in how the task could be tackled, 'Be free to approach this exploration in whatever way seems to fit your situation and your group.'<sup>58</sup> By prescribing the task, the project was able to more easily compare the methods used, while the openness of approach was a necessity for discovering the various ways in which the task was tackled. However, by limiting themselves to such an issue-based task that was presented in a discussion based format, the ways of engaging with the task were somewhat limited.

Churches throughout the Anglican Communion, within eight regional groups, were invited to contribute to the project, and yet the number and length of the 'core texts', as well as the complexity of the questions, suggests a pre-supposition of participation by fully literate communities who possessed Bibles.<sup>59</sup> This is problematic in a church that includes orally focused communities, such as Gambella, especially as the project had insisted at its launch that it sought to be inclusive. Clare Amos, the (then) Anglican Communion's Director for Theological Studies emphatically called for an inclusive breadth of engagement in the project: 'We want the people of the Anglican Communion *as a whole* to share the sense of urgency and importance that the project is generating. It is *vital* that

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<sup>58</sup> 'Case-study 1', BILC (Additional Material)

<<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> (p. 4) [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>59</sup> The number and length of the readings are potentially problematic even in the supposedly literate United Kingdom, see Introduction, p. 20. Readings for first Case-study: Genesis 1-2, Jeremiah 4:11-31, Psalm 104, Mark 4, Romans 8:12-27, Colossians 1:3-29, 2 Peter 3:1-13, and 'Song of the Three Young Men' 23-68 (Apocrypha, also as '*Benedicite, Omnia Opera*' in *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 4). The questions can be found in 'Case-study 1', BILC (Additional Material), p. 4.

*different regions* of the Anglican world are *empowered* to make their *distinctive* contributions.’<sup>60</sup> This aspiration has yet to be realized.

If Clare Amos, in speaking on the project’s behalf could look for inclusivity and an empowerment of all churches’ commitment to the project, it is clear that the biblical engagement of the case-study had needed alternative approaches to enable the participation of Anglicans living in orally focused communities such as Gambella. Though the *Bible in the Life of the Church* report is concerned at decline in biblical literacy, language literacy appears to have been assumed.<sup>61</sup> It seems that it had not thought to reach beyond the literate or beyond those who had access to both Old and New Testament in the vernacular. In both its method and findings the orally focused are a hidden margin of the ordinary non-scholarly readers who *are* an overt concern of the more scholarly, less ‘ordinary’ compilers of the report.

Amongst the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project’s finding of gaps, as well as that between ‘academy and pew’ the report noted one ‘between the fruits of our engagement’ and ‘the process of that engagement’.<sup>62</sup> Both the ordinary Christians of Gambella and the regional report from South Sudan evidence a concern for correct knowledge rather than interpretative tools, but it is these tools that could facilitate interpretation that is less reliant on the academy.<sup>63</sup> With this in mind, the report rightly asks, ‘How do we draw on the insights of the academy or scholar in such a way that those

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<sup>60</sup> Clare Amos, Anglican Communion News Service, “The Bible in the life of the Church” Project Launched by the Anglican Communion’ (28 January 2010), *Archive* (2015) <<http://www.anglicannews.org/>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>61</sup> BILC, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Davis, ‘Bible in Life of Sudanese Church’, p. 77.

in the pew both understand and are enriched in their Christian living?’<sup>64</sup> Diocesan schemes throughout the Communion, such as the ones in which I had taken my first steps in both studying and teaching theology, endeavour to begin to bridge this gap by providing introductory theological courses for lay people.<sup>65</sup>

This is presented as a one-way process of a sharing of gifts, where the minority, who have trained critical skills and intellectual knowledge, help the majority, who have no training in critical skills and have less intellectual knowledge. Yet, gifts also underline discrepancies of ability, strength and power.<sup>66</sup> The conversation of biblical scholarship of interpretative processes and interpretation may be seen as the dominant discourse while that of ordinary Christians within their church setting, wherever they are in the world, forms the majority but ‘minor’ one. Likening the relationship to that between generals and foot soldiers, Andrew Village describes the problem that this offers the academy in understanding the world-of-the-ordinary-Christian: ‘There is a strong temptation to impose on them ideas and thought patterns that arise from academic theory rather than the genuine reality of a non-academic world.’ He calls for a ‘bottom up’ approach as well as a ‘top down’ one.<sup>67</sup> Such approaches need to take the orally focused into account as well as the literate ordinary readers of Scripture. Daniel Patte critiques unquestioned attitudes of superiority (that even lie un-noticed within scholarly word choice, such as Village’s), insisting: ‘We must undergo a paradigm shift regarding the relationship between ordinary

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<sup>64</sup> BILC, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> The report specifically recommends Bible Society’s *h+* course, BILC, p. 48.

<sup>66</sup> Helen Nicholson, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 160.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew Village, *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 6.

and critical readers in order to conceive of them in a non-hierarchical way.’<sup>68</sup> Despite the growing current scholarly interest and concern with the ordinary Christian, such as Village’s and Rogers’, the domination remains in the critical conversation of the academy in which the ordinary Christian can play little part, and which may be felt by both those within and outside the academy to hold the key to understanding that often evades those outside.<sup>69</sup> Ched Myers considers the problem to be one of technological Western socialization that expects passivity in the face of professional ‘experts, whether they are plumbers or politicians’, or, as Louise Lawrence aptly adds of biblical studies, ‘priests and professors’.<sup>70</sup> In the same vein, Pete Phillips adds, what is described by Rogers as ‘preacherly polemic’, to a summary of a *National Biblical Literacy Survey* (2008):

... we have also managed to professionalise (clericalise) the Bible to such an extent that some might argue we are undoing the Reformation by depriving the masses of the very text which we wanted to bring them. [...] We tell people that the Bible needs to be interpreted properly and through quasi-scientific approaches that normal people cannot possibly understand. As such, we might as well have kept the Bible in Latin and the preserve of the Church. Instead, we have given people their own Bible but persuaded them that they still can’t read it – they still need another to

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: a Reevaluation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Village, *Bible and Lay People*; Andrew P. Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics: How Do We Read?* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).<sup>70</sup> Ched Myers, ‘Stories to Live By’, in in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses*, ed. by John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 33-38 (p. 33).

<sup>70</sup> Ched Myers, ‘Stories to Live By’, in in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses*, ed. by John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 33-38 (p. 33).

interpret the mysteries whether that other is liberal, evangelical, catholic or charismatic.<sup>71</sup>

It is against such academic domination, as well as social domination, that *Reading With* projects have been developed.<sup>72</sup>

Criticality is the key to academia, binding together all its disciplinary areas of its various schools and departments, separating the ‘scholarly’ from the ‘ordinary’ even in its very definition. In the everyday world to be critical is to make a harsh judgement exposing faults and shortcomings. In the academic world it is a more neutral term of judgement based upon an intellectual process of analysis and reflection. In contrast, returning to the ‘ordinary’ use of the word critical, it is a judgement that may be made hastily as a result of intuition, or after a period of thought and reflection. Within the academy, such intuition may have taken place, but it will need to be followed by a process of testing analysis to argue for the veracity of the intuited response. However, education is a gradual process and the distinction is not quite so clear cut. For both the scholar and the ordinary ‘reader’ making judgements, and thus in some sense ‘critical thinking’ is a part of everyday life and so will have effect upon all biblical interpretation, whether by the orally focused, the literate ordinary reader, or scholars who use specific methods and questions to engage in their task.

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<sup>71</sup> Pete Phillips (website unobtainable), quoted in Rogers, *Congregational Hermeneutics*, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> See Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, (p. 124). For examples, see Gerald O. West, ed., *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

Ched Myers robustly insists that ordinary Christians must be freed to make their own interpretations: 'In populist Bible study we may get things wrong, but we nevertheless have the right – and duty – to struggle with these texts.'<sup>73</sup> I suggest that it is only through participation in the interpretative process that understanding may be reached, owned and appropriated. Yet, the question remains, how is the ordinary orally focused Christian to engage with Scripture so that they *can* 'struggle with these texts'? There seems to be a need for alternative methods of interpretation so that Scripture may speak to ordinary orally focused 'readers' and hearers of Scripture within their own contexts in a way that makes relevant and transformative sense within the life of their own Christian communities. The purpose of this research is to propose and investigate devised drama as one such alternative method of 'reading' Scripture.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Through this chapter I have considered the problem of Scripture and its interpretation in the life of the Anglican Communion. I have demonstrated that its orally focused communities, such as the Anglican churches of Gambella, remain an overlooked margin. The *Bible in the Life of the Church* report had called for the insights of the academy to enrich those in the pew. In supporting the second phase of the project, the Archbishop of Canterbury, seeking togetherness rather than otherness and with greater potential openness wonders un-specifically with regard to biblical engagement and interpretation: 'Can their [other Anglicans] context and perspectives be a gift to mine?'<sup>74</sup> Developing Welby's insight, I wonder if as well as being recipients, ordinary orally focused Christians approaching Scripture through the alternative hermeneutic of devised drama could have their own gifts to offer the Anglican Communion and the wider church. With this question

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<sup>73</sup> Ched Myers, 'Stories to Live By', (p. 34).

<sup>74</sup> Justin Welby, Anglican Communion, 'The Bible in the Life of the Church Project'.

in mind the next chapter turns to the interest of sub-Saharan theology and biblical scholarship in orally focused Christians, and to the limited scholarly material that is available on devised biblical drama.

## Chapter Four

### Orality, Literacy, Embodiment in sub-Saharan Africa:

#### A Braided Approach to Biblical Interpretation through Devised Biblical Drama

There are many ways of teaching. Now, we are talking about drama. And we know we preach the Bible. We preach the Bible, but we need another method of teaching the Bible. That is why we use drama. (Michael Anyar Garang)<sup>1</sup>

Orally focused communities, such as *Michael's*, need alternative approaches to enable biblical engagement within their particular context. This chapter engages with the literature from sub-Saharan Africa which informs the background to my research, providing the scholarly context within which the work is situated. I begin with a consideration of the concern and interest within sub-Saharan African biblical and theological scholarship for the world of ordinary orally focused Christians and their engagement with Scripture. This presentation of orality as a different hermeneutical approach to the text to that of critical literacy has provided an overview that I develop to suggest that the embodiment of drama may offer a third way, that I present here as a braid of approaches incorporating aspects of the oral and of the critical as well as the embodied. Secondly, I consider the limited material from sub-Saharan Africa on devised biblical drama itself,

#### 4.1 Scripture in Orally Focused Communities

Scholarly writing in sub-Saharan Africa on Scripture often pays attention to the interpretative practices of ordinary 'readers' and hearers, many of whom will be most at

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group, Tuesday, December 2011.



ease in an oral culture.<sup>2</sup> Crucially, John Mbiti insists that ‘the Bible does not despise those who cannot read’, proposing, like the biblical performance scholars, that most of Scripture began its life in an oral form, and that even once committed to text, engagement with it was still most generally through oral/aural means, rather than through reading and writing.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Jesus himself discussed the Scriptures orally, and his teaching was not reliant on the presence of a written scroll.<sup>4</sup> Widespread literacy, even in the West is a relatively recent phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Historically, orality/aurality has always been the primary means of communication, remaining a permanent feature of human lives, despite the development of writing and the current explosion of electronic technologies.<sup>6</sup> However, as I have demonstrated, it is particularly within sub-Saharan Africa that orality remains the necessarily core feature of the way of life of many communities and it is here, through my illustrative example of Gambella that my own concern is concentrated.<sup>7</sup>

Seemingly in contradiction to his comment that Scripture ‘does not despise’ the non-literate, Mbiti also states that for ‘Africans’ who cannot read, ‘the Bible is a closed

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald West proposes that African biblical scholarship ‘is more closely linked to the Church and the ordinary “readers” of the Bible who make up its membership than most’, in ‘Indigenous Exegesis: Exploring the Interface between Missionary Methods and the Rhetorical Rhythms of Africa – Locating Local Reading Resources in the Academy’, *Neotestamentica*, 36 (2002), 147-162 (p. 149). For examples, see essays in Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, eds, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> John Mbiti, ‘The Bible in African Culture’, in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. by Rosino Gibellini (London: SCM, 1994), pp. 27-39 (pp. 29-31).

<sup>4</sup> Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth is the exception, Luke 4:16-30.

<sup>5</sup> The 1870 Education Act forms a significant marker in movement towards national literacy in England and Wales.

<sup>6</sup> For account of the primacy of orality, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002). For account of electronic media as a form of ‘secondary orality’, see Ong, pp. 133-135.

<sup>7</sup> For statistics on literacy, see pp. 20-21.

book' that is 'kept away from them'.<sup>8</sup> Reading and writing forms part of the power base of elites, fixing and holding ideas in a form that is not equally available to all.<sup>9</sup> The failure of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project of the Anglican Communion to extend its concern with grass roots Anglicans as far as her orally focused membership fits into this pattern, as unintended hegemony.<sup>10</sup> Literacy had been implicitly assumed. There is an ambiguity within Mbiti's comments, for as well as propounding the 'closed' nature of the Bible as a book that cannot be read, he also points to the situation where 'many Africans who cannot read, or only read very little actually know the Bible from hearing it read aloud'.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps Mbiti both states the problem of a seeming hegemony amongst an educated readership, and also that its solution already lies within orality itself through the encouragement of the living tradition that remains centred on oral communication. He affirms the power and potential of orality, encouraging its' use in biblical interpretation, considering the lively oral tradition of 'Africa' as better placed to rediscover the oral tradition within Scripture than elsewhere, for 'written tradition has subdued and almost killed the oral art'.<sup>12</sup> Such comments suggest, and once more in line with biblical performance scholarship, that oral approaches access Scripture in ways that are less freely available to those who engage with the text primarily through literacy. If such is the case,

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<sup>8</sup> Mbiti, 'Bible in African Culture', p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Draper considers literacy as 'a form of control, not only of information but also of people', 'Script, Subjugation, and Subversion: An Introduction', in *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, ed. by Jonathan A. Draper, Semeia 46 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

<sup>10</sup> Hereafter BILC, Anglican Communion, *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery: Report of the Anglican Communion "Bible in the Life of the Church" Project* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2012). <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

<sup>11</sup> Mbiti, 'Bible in African Culture', p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

then biblical scholarship and churches need to pay attention not only to the reading practices of ordinary readers, but more specifically, also to those of ordinary hearers, in order for both the Church and biblical scholarship to be able to receive and use the gifts of orality as well as those of scholarly literacy.

The world-of-the-ordinary-orally-focused-‘reader’ is explored in Jonathan Draper’s regional study of Anglicans in the Pietermaritzburg region of South Africa (1988).<sup>13</sup> Like the current *Bible in the Life of the Church* project, it sought ‘to find out what Anglicans were actually doing in Bible study groups across the various socio-economic divides’.<sup>14</sup> As the project developed, its general focus was directed onto parishes within ‘residual-oral’ communities.

Draper’s initial study also bears resemblance to the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project’s assumptions of critical literacy as the norm. He had assumed the centrality of the printed text of the Bible and had concern for how biblical scholarship could reach ‘grassroots black communities’.<sup>15</sup> Undergraduate students from similar backgrounds to participants within the study acted as participant-observer researchers, giving historical, geographical and socio-economic textual background to aid a close reading of the text. Initial findings indicated a resistance amongst his participants to study-groups, for they maintained that as the direct Word of God, Scripture should be approached reverently with

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan A. Draper, ‘Confessional Western Text-Centred Biblical Interpretation and an Oral Residual Context’, in *“Reading With”: An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible: African Overtures*, ed. by Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, Semeia 73 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 59-77.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 62-67.

its spiritual meaning presented authoritatively from the pulpit by a priest rather than through open discussion.

Though the group involved were literate, Draper noted that the method of textual engagement of Bible study was in tension with the oral methods at work in this Anglican Church's 'Revival' meetings in which the community felt more comfortable, and in which they did feel free to interpret Scripture.<sup>16</sup> A second stage of research focused on these revival meetings. Here, a seamless merging of prayer, testimony, Bible-sharing, singing, and dancing showed Draper the corporate way in which Scripture was really engaged with within this community.<sup>17</sup> The biblical text was read, but there was no analytical word-by-word or verse-by-verse discussion of what the text meant, or any discussion of doctrinal and abstract concepts. Instead, the Bible passage acted as the starter for an oral performance of response and application in which the story was re-told through a free representation by members of the group building up a communal interpretation through a dialogue that was immediately applicable to their context. Within the wider oral performance Scripture was read, remembered, interpreted and applied, though according to Draper, 'unreflectively'.<sup>18</sup>

Draper perceived the Bible-study and Revival meetings within this community as representing 'Literacy and Orality' respectively, further noting that both the community and his student-fieldworkers were most at ease within the oral framework.<sup>19</sup> Further research in a more deeply rural and oral community confirmed the earlier findings of the

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<sup>16</sup> Draper, 'Confessional Biblical Interpretation', p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 69-71.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

urban setting.<sup>20</sup> Bible study and Revival meetings demand very different approaches to Scripture, but it seems less certain that the interpretation taking place in the revival meetings can be termed unreflective, though clearly within a different form to that taking place within a Bible-study that is based upon the questions and fruits of biblical scholarship.

Beyond the Anglican Church, among women of the African Independent Churches of Botswana, Musa Dube analyses a similar contrast of approaches to Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Firstly, she used her own 'Western and textual-centric questionnaire' to analyse the women's interpretation of a Bible passage. This she contrasted with the 'traditional' *Semoya* (of the Spirit) way of 'reading' of her participants, 'graphically bringing the story to life' through a communal pattern of re-call and re-telling.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Draper's perception of the unreflective nature of such interpretation, Dube considers that 'the nuances of interpretation' were found within the interjection of songs and repetitions, despite the lack of a focused search for any explicit definition of meaning.

Both Draper and Dube consider that the Revival meetings and the *Semoya* interpretation are traditional oral ways of approaching the hermeneutical task. Gerald West describes such communal, improvised, dialogical and cyclical interpretative processes of orality as akin to *marabi*, South African jazz.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on Duncan Brown, West suggests they are part of an 'African ontology' that emphasizes the circularity of life in contrast

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<sup>20</sup> Draper, 'Confessional Biblical Interpretation', pp. 72-75.

<sup>21</sup> Musa Dube, 'Readings of *Semoya*: Batswana Women's Interpretations of Matt. 15:21-28', in "*Reading With*", ed. by Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, *Semeia* 73 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 111-129.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> West, 'Indigenous Exegesis', p. 156.

with the ‘linear, progressive, and teleological colonial-Christian model’ of literacy.<sup>24</sup> West, in company with Draper and Dube indicates that the contrast in biblical engagement lies between two types of thinking, between that of the ‘structured and systematic sets of questions’ of Western inspired academic criticality, with the more patterned forms of orality that they perceive as typified within sub-Saharan Africa.

These views can be seen as illustrative and derivative (explicitly so by Draper) of Walter Ong’s seminal work on orality and literacy.<sup>25</sup> Contrasting the stability of writing with the flux of the spoken word, Ong draws out the implications of each mode of communication. Orality is additive, aggregative and copious as it builds in an organic, participatory and often formulaic way that resonates with experience of reality, enabling those who listen to engage with, memorize and recall what they have heard.<sup>26</sup> The stability of writing enables its closer analysis, and for a greater abstraction and distance from the realities of situated life. Writing therefore permits close reading which, with its careful attention to textual detail encourages the critical approach to the text that seemingly Draper intended by his contrast of reflective and unreflective ‘reading’.<sup>27</sup>

Criticality is what is often described by scholarly accounts as wanting in ordinary ‘reading’. I have already noted this contrast between ‘academy and pew’ in the *Bible in the Life of the Church* report, which can be seen as despite the fact that the contrast was made between types of literacy and not between literacy and orality. The situation within sub-

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<sup>24</sup> Duncan Brown, *Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 107, quoted by West, ‘Indigenous Exegesis’, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup> Draper, ‘Confessional Biblical Interpretation’, pp. 67-69.

<sup>26</sup> Ong contrasts characteristics of orality and literacy, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 33-49.

<sup>27</sup> Draper, ‘Confessional Biblical Interpretation’, p. 75.

Saharan Africa with its more obviously orally focused communities renders this perceived contrast between ordinary ‘reading’ and critical reading more clearly. Analysis of a *Bible in Africa* study of ordinary ‘readers’ in Port Harcourt, Nigeria (1991) led both Justin Ukpong and John Riches to call for these ‘readers’ to be helped towards a more critical approach to Scripture.<sup>28</sup> This is also the inspiration behind ‘Reading with’ projects, and in line with the concern of the *Bible in the Life of the Church* report that ‘the insights of the academy’ may be used to enable ordinary Anglicans to ‘both understand and [be] enriched in their Christian living’.<sup>29</sup>

To accept these views would suggest that unless aided, critical modes of thinking lie outside the grasp of the ordinary ‘reader’. However, the question has to again be asked as to what is meant by ‘criticality’. West points to the hegemonic assumptions of academia that the term ‘criticality’ represents the ‘structured and systematic questioning’ of their own ways of analysis, that form their own linear methods of interpretative reading, to which I would add, writing.<sup>30</sup> *Marabi* (both actual, and as a metaphorical way of referring to oral approaches to Scripture, epitomized by Draper’s Revival meeting), has a more cyclic nature, but *is* another hermeneutical method of ‘reading’, and again I have to add, of ‘writing’.<sup>31</sup> Ordinary ‘readers’ make their own interpretations which may not be scholarly, but unless they are repeated by rote from another ‘reader’, they do engage the reflective

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<sup>28</sup> Justin Ukpong, ‘Popular Readings of the Bible in Africa and Implications for Academic Readings’, in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, pp. 582-594; John Riches, ‘Interpreting the Bible in African Contexts: Glasgow Consultation’, in “*Reading With*”, ed. by Gerald West and Musa W. Dube (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 181-188.

<sup>29</sup> See Gerald West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently: Giving Shape to the Discourses of the Dominated’, in “*Reading With*”, ed. by Gerald West and Musa W. Dube (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 21-41; BILC, p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> West, ‘Indigenous Exegesis’, p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

critical faculties (as inferred by Dube), albeit unsystematically without the benefit of the training that leads to the systematic methods of the trained biblical scholar.

In contrast to the concern of Draper, Ukpong, and Riches at the lack of criticality of the ordinary ‘reader’, and more in line with Dube, Mogomme Alpheus Masoga asserts and celebrates the critical nature at work in the reflectivity of everyday scriptural interpretation of ‘conversational biblical hermeneutics’ in which experience of life, God, and Scripture are all ‘interrogated’.<sup>32</sup> Masoga’s illustration is a fictional character in a short story that he has written, but this same conversational-critical view of Scripture can be seen in Nicole Simopoulos’ study in which she read the story of Hagar with a group of South African women who brought their own lives into conversation with that of Hagar:

[Voice 1] You work, and then you end up getting food, not money. [...] So that makes a person tend to be a slave. And usually people won’t say, “This is enough. I’m going.”

[Voice 2] It would seem that even the Angel of the Lord was treating Hagar badly because she had received enough ill-treatment from Sarah and now the Angel says, “You go back.” You know it is like the angel was approving of what happened there. [...] It was O.K. for Sarah to oppress this poor African lady.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mogomme Alpheus Masoga, “Dear God! Give Us Our Daily Leftovers and We Will be Able to Forgive Those Who Trouble Our Souls”: Some Perspectives on Conversational Biblical Hermeneutics and Theologies’, in *Reading Otherwise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, ed. by Gerald O. West, Semeia 62 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 19-27 (p. 24).

<sup>33</sup> Nicole M. Simopoulos, ‘Who was Hagar? Mistress, Divorcee, Exile, or Exploited Worker: An Analysis of Contemporary Grassroots Readings of Genesis 16 by Caucasian, Latina, and South African Women’, in *Reading Otherwise: Socially Engaged Biblical*



Such ordinary 'reading' of Scripture generally takes place within a trusting framework of reverence for the Word of God. Yet, even here, Simopoulos' example supports Masoga's view in its suggestion that within a safe, yet open, communal space of conversational theology an element of question has been allowed to enter the interpretation as experience of life and Scripture are held up to offer each other illumination. Such thinking may be based upon an intuitive approach, but it is also founded upon an untrained form of reflective criticality that is willing to engage questioningly with the text.<sup>34</sup>

In a closing commentary on the essays in *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, Terence Ranger correctly warns against frameworks in which literacy and orality, colonial and indigenous (and academy and pew, critical and ordinary) are placed in the binary opposition of an either-or, preferring a mediatory approach that perceives them as interpenetrating each other in a 'polyphonic' production of culture.<sup>35</sup> Yet, despite Ranger's helpful reminder that orality and literacy are often in such dynamic relationship, Draper, Dube and West's distinction between the linearity of literacy and the cyclic nature of orality remains one that does signify differences of approach favoured by different groups. While not denoting use of or lack of use of reflective thinking, the distinction also indicates particular needs within communities where it is only the few, rather than the

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*Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, ed. by Gerald O. West, Semeia 62 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 63-72 (p. 70).

<sup>34</sup> Werner Kahl, 'Growing Together: Challenges and Chances in the Encounter of Critical and Intuitive Interpreters of the Bible', in *Reading Otherwise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*, ed. by Gerald O. West, Semeia 62 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 147-158 (pp. 148-149).

<sup>35</sup> Terence Ranger, 'Commentary', in *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, ed. by Jonathan A. Draper, Semeia 46 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 229-248 (p. 238).

majority who can read. Beyond this, while approaches of orality and critical literacy may differ in that they produce differing types of ‘readings’, each context may have something of value to offer those who do not normally use them.

As will be demonstrated within this research, I suggest that devised biblical drama bears some similarities of method to both styles of approach that have here been denoted as favouring orality or literacy. Though not cyclic, devised drama, like the oral performances illustrated by Draper and Dube, offers its meaning through the fluidity of its process of developing a re-telling of a remembered text, and one where meaning is evinced not only from what has been chosen to be told but also from the way in which it is told. Such flexibility before the text is very different to the meticulous reading of Tribble that I have suggested could act as a pattern for an embodied approach to the text. Yet, devised biblical drama also bears some resemblance to the close reading of such analytical approaches in that it begins with the text-as-it-is and demands an exploratory ‘reading’ in order that its enactors may envisage how the text can operate in physical terms, and within the linearity of a temporal narrative form. The communal nature of devising ensures the conversational style of biblical hermeneutics illustrated by Simopoulos, but within the practical nature of devising drama rather than within a Bible-study group. The physicality of embodiment demands a third dimension to the duality of orality and literacy, offering drama as a method that is formed from a triple braid of approach, so perhaps helping to bridge the apparent gap between those that favour either orality or critical literacy.

## 4.2 Devised Biblical Drama as a Hermeneutical Tool

### 4.2.1 An Overview

Biblical drama in sub-Saharan Africa is not an innovative suggestion, for several biblical and theological scholars from that context mention the use of drama within church life. However, they provide little elaboration of its use. Placing together brief extracts mentioning drama offers a pattern within their references. These are taken from varying parts of sub-Saharan Africa and over a forty-year time-scale.<sup>36</sup>

The Anglican Bishop, Henry Okullo (Kenya, 1974) envisages a largely rural ‘Africa’, claiming that drama, as an integral part of what happens at the grass roots of oral practice, *is* at the heart of African Christian theology:

When we are looking for African theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church [...]. We must look at the way in which Christianity is being planted in Africa through music, *drama*, songs, dances, art, paintings. [...] Can it be that all this is an empty show? It is impossible. *This then is African theology.*<sup>37</sup>

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ghana, 1986) calls for oral theology to be collected and studied so that it may be understood beyond its own context:

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<sup>36</sup> This catalogue of references to biblical drama devised by church groups within scholarly sub-Saharan African theology and biblical studies records what I have found, and may well be incomplete.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Okullo (my emphases), *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: 1974), p. 54, quoted by Diane Stinton, ‘Africa, East and West’, in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. by John Parratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 105-136 (p. 107). A very similar reference may be found in John Mbiti, ‘The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology’, in *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, Accra, December 1977*, ed. by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977), pp. 83-94.

This oral theology has not to my knowledge been systematically collected in Africa. *Collecting them* is an important task if we are really to *appreciate the religion* of those who sing these songs. [...] Theological expression may also be found in sculpture and in *drama*.<sup>38</sup>

Mbiti (Kenya, 1994) insists on the value of oral tradition for itself, as an enrichment of the local church community:

Churches *should facilitate and exploit oral tradition* through more public readings of the Bible, more story-telling from the Bible, more memorization of passages and verses, more songs and hymns based on and actually using Bible passages, more *biblical plays*.<sup>39</sup>

Dube (Botswana, 1996) contends that within the African Independent Churches such performative forms of expression are a means of integrating the ‘wisdom’ of the two traditions at work in their Christian communities, so leading to alternative approaches to theology:

The rise of AICs therefore marked the first groups of African Christians who freely sought to yoke the wisdom of *Christianity* and *African religions* in the service of

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<sup>38</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye (my emphases), *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), p. 50. Many essays within *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* are concerned with recording oral local practice, for instance see David Tuesday Adamo, ‘The Use of Psalms in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria’, ed. by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 336-349.

<sup>39</sup> Mbiti (my emphases), ‘Bible in African Culture’, p. 30.

life and diversity. In keeping with the discourse of song, *drama*, dance, and ritual, such a creative integration was *hardly characterised by a systematic theological debate* according to theological orthodoxy.<sup>40</sup>

I end this patchwork of voices with Kabiro wa Gatumu (Kenya, 2013) and his report for the Anglican *Bible in the Life of the Church* project. Though concerned with Anglican rather than African Independent/Instituted Churches, Gatumu writes from a similar perspective to that of Dube, suggesting that ‘Africa’ has at its roots creative and traditional, ‘primal’ means of hermeneutical expression that could, and should be used to enable enhanced ‘reading’ of Scripture:

There are *many tools in African primal religions* and worldviews that can help us *become better interpreters of the Bible*. These include songs, stories/myths/legends, *drama*, poetry, proverbs, riddles and idiomatic expressions [...].<sup>41</sup>

Within the different forms of grass roots oral practice, as exemplified by each writer, drama is affirmed almost in the same breath as singing, drumming, dancing, art .... Scholars who are interested in oral and local theology and biblical interpretation perceive drama as simply one form of a variety of creative and indigenous expressions of faith. They stress not only that oral theology *is* happening, but that it should *continue* to be actively encouraged as a valid form of doing theology. This is despite, or perhaps because

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<sup>40</sup> Dube (my emphases), ‘Readings of *Semoya*’, p. 112.

<sup>41</sup> Kabiro wa Gatumu (my emphases), ‘Pamoja Reading’, in *The Bible in the Life of the Church*, ed. by Clare Amos (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2013), pp. 22-31 (p. 30). Unionmwan Edebiri recalls that ‘drama has featured prominently in the cultural life of preliterate African society’, in ‘Drama as Popular Culture in Africa’, *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* (1983), 139-149 (p. 139).

(as Dube insists) of its very difference to the Western inspired ways of academic theology and biblical studies. For all these writers, utilizing Okullo's words and paraphrasing Mbiti, 'This *is* African theology' also extends to 'and this should *continue* to be African theology'. As the *Bible in the Life of the Church* project has endeavoured to acknowledge, theology and biblical interpretation has to stretch to include the grass roots as well as the academy. The sub-Saharan African theologians, quoted here, understand further, that to stretch to include the ordinary Christian, theology has to include beside critical literacy, indigenous approaches and methods of orality amongst which, these scholars insist that biblical drama is one form.

The examples given add little substance to what they enumerate, while Patrick Kalilombe (Malawi, 1988) suggests drama as a tool of a four-stage interpretative process (as indicated below) that is clearly reminiscent of the hermeneutical/pastoral cycle of the liberation theologians:

When the audience [the hearers of Scripture] proceeds to act out *what they have taken in* [experience], they inevitably *select what struck them* [reflection], and automatically *express why and in what way it struck them* [analysis]. By reproducing it through drama they are also *applying the meaning* [application] to their familiar world in familiar idiom.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Patrick A. Kalilombe (my emphases), 'A Malawian Example: the Bible and the Non-literate Communities', in *Voices from the Margins: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. by R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), pp. 442-453 (p. 450). For a description of such 'theology-in-action' and its development from liberation theology, see *Theological Reflection: Methods*, by Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward (London: SCM, 2005), pp. 170-199.

The process of biblical interpretation has by the means of drama been moved beyond both oral *and* critical formats to include a *physical embodiment* that has to select from the passage in order to articulate and display an interpretation of what has been heard, using experience and knowledge through indigenous forms of expression and communication. People can do no other than use what they have at hand in terms of their knowledge and experience, their belief and practice.

This short catalogue of references to devised biblical drama within sub-Saharan African theology opens up the focus of my research. It is viewed as one form of traditional oral art that applied to Scripture, within a confessional setting, forms an embodied process of theological reflection through its biblical interpretation. Beyond these few references I have found only three works which discuss actual examples of devised biblical drama within the African Church. Two, are photographic records from the 1950s of Passion Plays performed by the students, staff and wives of the Anglican theological college in Kabubiro, Uganda. The third book, a more recent study (2002) by Musimbi Kanyoro, is of her oral project with women in Bware, a rural Kenyan setting.

#### **4.2.2 John Taylor: Passion Plays in Colonial Uganda (1950?, 1957)<sup>43</sup>**

Through his introductions to the photographs, Taylor provides textual amplification that is aimed at the spiritual enrichment of an ordinary Western Christian audience rather than as an addition to critical scholarship. Emanating from the latter years of a colonial Uganda, his reflections on the use of biblical drama remain apposite, even though Uganda, Africa, and Christianity reside in a very different world today. Forming a major part of the

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<sup>43</sup> John Taylor, *Were You There? An African Presentation of the Passion Story* (London: Highway Press, [1950?]), pp. 9-19; John Taylor and Hans Leuenberger, *The Passion in Africa* (London: Mowbray, 1957), I have numbered the pages of the Introduction [pp. 1-9].

community's celebration of Good Friday, Taylor describes these plays as liturgical acts of 'worship and love' made through 're-presentation' of the Passion.<sup>44</sup> The plays had a three-directional purpose: offered and focused towards God, nurturing and forming the members of the Christian college community who produced and performed each play, and also extending a welcome beyond its bounds to the wider community, seeking 'to make visible to others a vision which, by the grace of God they had seen'.<sup>45</sup> For actors and audience it was intended as an experiential and affective participation in the divine story:

It was part of a continuous attempt to show that the Christian faith is something more than a system of tenets to be believed or a pattern of behaviour to be obeyed, and to bring it down into the hidden realm of imagination and emotion where it can quicken compassion and compel a deep personal response.<sup>46</sup>

Taylor perceives the activity of embodying the story as a participation that, in its depth of meaning, led to a heightened and lasting spiritual awareness where participants were 'in some degree transfigured by the glory of that which together we were trying to enter into and portray'.<sup>47</sup>

Though not seeking to act as an exercise in biblical hermeneutics, as an embodied re-telling of the story the plays are necessarily acts of interpretation as well as of worship. Though initial interpretation was made by a member of the teaching staff acting as a producer, Taylor stresses that the plays were more a result of the combined improvisational

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<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *Were You There?* p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, *Passion in Africa*, [pp. 3, 9].

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, [p. 3].

<sup>47</sup> Taylor, *Were You There?* p. 17.



devising of the whole cast.<sup>48</sup> Though this was not a ‘critical’ scholarly interpretation and was not intended to be, the process of drama allowed and invited, and even demanded an intuitive, reflective, and dialogical communal response to the text that remained closely and faithfully rooted in the Scripture out of which it had developed, for the biblical text was both ‘the final arbiter and the inexhaustible spring of inspiration’.

As with the earlier catalogue of references to the use of biblical drama Taylor views the form of devised drama as particularly apposite for the community’s deep roots in its traditional orality, for ‘it seems more natural that the acting of the story should precede and give birth to the dialogue’.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, he moves beyond the consideration of orality to the embodied form of drama itself, suggesting that the ‘gift’ of ‘spontaneous, powerful dramatization’ is ‘their most natural and vital medium of expression’.<sup>50</sup> The dramatic, embodied form had enabled the re-telling of the story in a manner suited to its orally-focused context while also involving close engagement with the text.

#### **4.2.3 Musimbi Kanyoro: A Dramatized Ruth in Rural Kenya (2002)<sup>51</sup>**

While forming her investigation of feminist cultural hermeneutics, Kanyoro’s *Festival on Ruth*, with women from her own home village, also provides an account of devised biblical drama focusing on *Ruth*’s female characters.<sup>52</sup> As within my use of drama in Gambella, her project evinced great enthusiasm from most of the women who were eager and willing to participate. She noted the depth of engagement where ‘members of a

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<sup>48</sup> Taylor, *Passion in Africa*, [p. 4].

<sup>49</sup> Taylor, *Were You There?* p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

group would sit for hours talking, arguing, reading the text loudly with others interrupting with a suggestion or a new revelation'.<sup>53</sup> The form of drama demanded close engagement with the text as groups looked carefully at its different characters. Though not everyone could read, each group included those who could, so that the text could be read and re-read aloud, as the women together became familiar with the text and explored their communal interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond the conversational biblical hermeneutics of Masoga there was an active, playful and embodied involvement with the text that women later described as 'like children's games'.<sup>55</sup> Kanyoro describes the scene: 'I saw women visiting the bush, collecting dry wood, picking tiny pieces of dry grass, hesitating in their next actions, and it was clear that something was going on. I saw processions walking the road. I heard singing. I heard laughter and at times funeral dirges being sung'.<sup>56</sup> Kanyoro writes of the empathy with which each character was approached as the women used their own experience and knowledge to make sense of and present the story in terms applicable to their own context and traditions.<sup>57</sup> She comments: 'Never before had I seen women read themselves into the Bible as did this group.'<sup>58</sup> For instance, Ruth's marriage to Boaz brought heated discussion on several issues that were subsequently dramatized: polygamous marriage, young girls being married to older men, and of men having favoured sons.<sup>59</sup> The fresh configurations of the story through physical enactment demanded that the women entered into the story, presenting it 'as if' it was actually

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<sup>53</sup> Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

happening, and so enabling them to relate the text-itself to issues from within their own lives in embodied terms.

The *Festival of Ruth* was part of Kanyoro's search and call for an 'engendering of African cultural hermeneutics' through the world-of-the-text of Scripture conversing with the horizons of cultural authority and experience that keep women on the margins of their society.<sup>60</sup> Her concern for liberation and justice for these women offers resonance and enrichment to my own research through and beyond its consideration of drama. Kanyoro comments from her own context: 'The challenges facing African Christianity involve living faithfully within a culture that tries indeed to accommodate the pain and struggle of being a community, yet needs the love and liberating message of Jesus Christ to fulfil that which human abilities alone cannot do.'<sup>61</sup> This comment may be universalized for humans *are* both liberated and bound by the various cultures in which they are born and live, while the Gospel, through its dynamic play of memory and beckoning call, seeks to liberate humanity away from binding aspects of social-culture towards life lived in relationship with God and his kingdom, a perception I later develop through Ricoeur.<sup>62</sup> Kanyoro's focus on cultural hermeneutics differs from my own methodological focus on the use of drama as a hermeneutical tool. Yet, her desire for liberation and justice echoes with the roots of my own research.<sup>63</sup>

Kanyoro yearns for the *liberation of the Gospel* for the women of rural Africa who are bound by the patriarchal nature of both their ethnic culture and of much of Scripture

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<sup>60</sup> Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, pp. 10, 79-94.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>62</sup> See chapter five.

<sup>63</sup> Kanyoro, pp. 8, 11.

itself. The authority of these is as one call to obligation, providing constraints and boundaries, of Ricoeurian prefiguration, within which interpretation must be made, for she suggests that the women are not ready to debate with either.<sup>64</sup> Yet, though the women would not question the authority of the text they *were* willing to ‘imagine and speculate’ as they entered into the world-of-the-text through drama, so enabling playful, conversational dialogue with the text.<sup>65</sup> Kanyoro posits that this could mean that ‘the women of rural Africa are themselves a resource in the search for their liberation’, adding the question, ‘But how may this energy and possibility for self-liberation be nurtured to fruition?’<sup>66</sup> It is towards such nurture that her project was directed. The women’s engagement with the text of Ruth formed their own interpretation, and was made in depth and in relationship with their own lives. Devised biblical drama can be seen as offering an answer to Kanyoro’s question, for in offering a playful means of engagement with an authoritative text drama had enabled a creative freedom that acted dialogically with normative views of both text and life to enable their understanding of the proposed worlds within Scripture to be brought to enacted life.

Despite Kanyoro’s ‘excitement’ as she watched the women’s interpretative activity, she remains concerned that the dialogical dramatic interpretation did little to change the women’s attitudes towards their cultural silencing.<sup>67</sup> Yet, Kanyoro also writes of the energy generated by the project, and the way in which it gave women ‘safe space’ in which to share and explore.<sup>68</sup> Through the activity of dramatization women were enabled to talk of and play with difficult subjects openly, within the safe community of the workshop, as

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<sup>64</sup> Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, pp. 6-7, 40-41.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 18, 83.

they engaged with the proposed worlds of the biblical text. Perhaps Kanyoro was seeking too much too quickly, for she realised that though the younger women were silenced, ‘again and again’ by the more conservative older women, yet they ‘are not silent, that they refuse to be silent’. It is impossible to know just what liberating seeds for transformation had been sown within the women’s conversation and activity as they engaged performatively with the lives of Ruth, Naomi and Orpah. Drama had offered a freedom within which these seeds could be discovered, planted and nurtured. The festival had offered the space and time away from the everyday that encourages reflection on life through the lens of its own focus, which here was the book of *Ruth*. Dramatization within that separated space/time provided yet another nested space/time of ‘make-believe’, enabling liberative play with both their everyday context and that of the proposed world of *Ruth*.

Though concerned that little had changed for the women, Kanyoro records her ‘wonder and excitement’ at the ‘hermeneutical event taking place among these rural women whom scholars would rarely consult’.<sup>69</sup> This forms Kanyoro’s second concern, of *justice through listening* that would enable the voices of such women to be heard, for she argues that their theological reflections should not be excluded from making their contribution to the wider theological thinking at work in sub-Saharan Africa. This desire underpinned her return to her village, ‘to learn from them [the women] about what it means to live and experience Christ in this [isolated] place’.<sup>70</sup> Seeking to bring these voices of rural African women into conversation with scholarly theological thinking, she insists on

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<sup>69</sup> Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

the ‘significance of [such] oral media as a source of learning for theologians’, for it challenges them to do theology in a different way.<sup>71</sup>

This same desire for both enabling and learning from the biblical engagement and theological reflection of ordinary Christians has ever been a part of my approach to and experience of teaching theology within confessional settings, and is here at the heart of my own search for and exploration of devised drama as an alternative approach to Scripture. Calling for the insights of the academy to enrich the biblical engagement of the ordinary Anglican, *The Bible in the Life of the Church* report has to be challenged by Kanyoro’s call, as a *matter of justice*, for theologians (and church leaders) within their world of critical literacy to learn from and be enriched by the gifts of ordinary oral theology.<sup>72</sup>

The project of engendering cultural hermeneutics grew out of Kanyoro’s twin concerns for justice and liberation, and led to her methodology built around what she describes as ‘story-telling’, but that in practice was the devised biblical drama of my research.<sup>73</sup> She insists that doing theology in Africa has to take account of the ordinary Christian, and echoes Mbiti’s assertion that ‘the Bible does not despise those who cannot read’:

The illiteracy on our continent will not determine our access to the grace of God, but it has to be a concern of those doing theology in Africa. The project for this

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<sup>71</sup> Kanyoro’s work accords with the 1984 call of the World Council of Churches for theologians and churches to seek “how people at local levels can enter into the discussion on Gospel and culture”, quoted by Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> BILC, p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> Kanyoro, p. 23.

work shows that one can work with illiterate communities and that such an inclusion is an issue of justice, not simply a choice.<sup>74</sup>

Kanyoro's call for theologians to do theology differently is a question of 'method not content', for theology will remain merely 'about' people's theology unless there is participation.<sup>75</sup> The work/play of Kanyoro's festival had contributed to her own theological reflection as well as enabling a process of participative and enacted theological reflection to take place amongst her group of orally-focused women, just as my research in Gambella had not only sought material for the content of my study, but had also sought to enable the church leaders' reflection on devised drama as a means of scriptural engagement, at the same time as challenging me to ensuring, as a matter of justice, that the men's reflections were given adequate voice within this study.

Beyond the difference of context, the purposes of the dramatized biblical engagement as related by Taylor and Kanyoro are clearly differing. For Taylor the major purpose was in the worshipful participation in the re-presentation of the story of the Passion of Christ that looked towards a spiritual liberation of the individual. In contrast, Kanyoro sought for a conversational and active story-telling approach to biblical interpretation and theological reflection that would enable a communal questioning of culture, that can be seen as 'critical' in nature and looking towards social liberation of the community. These are both responses to the Gospel, and both look to devised drama as a tool. The perceived purpose of the drama for the women is less clear. It is apparent that the

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<sup>74</sup> Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, p. 31; Mbiti, 'Bible in African Culture', p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> Kanyoro, p. 30.

festival has been a communal ‘treat’ away from their daily chores.<sup>76</sup> It allowed the women time and space to explore a loved book of the Bible for themselves in relationship with their own lives and context. What is apparent, and as Kanyoro herself realises, is that they do not perceive the same goal as Kanyoro herself. Yet, they have participated in both their own and Kanyoro’s theological reflection, as also can be said of Taylor and his actors. Interpreting the Bible through drama *is* a form of theological reflection, but its purposes may be many, and they may well not be the same for the participants as for the participant-observer researcher. It is a salutary reminder for this researcher of Gambella where my fieldwork was also aimed at a shared purpose, in my case of investigating devised biblical drama as an interpretative process.

Notwithstanding Taylor and Kanyoro, I have found a dearth of material specifically focused on devised biblical drama within local churches in sub-Saharan Africa. Oduyoye offers a reminder that most oral expressions of Christianity, by their very nature as oral rather than textual, go unrecorded and un-noticed outside their immediate locality.<sup>77</sup> Within the concern for enabling and learning from ordinary theology and hermeneutics that I share with many sub-Saharan African theologians and biblical scholars, a need can be seen for the greater depth of investigation into devised biblical drama as a hermeneutical tool that my study provides.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Despite Ranger’s insistence on the interpenetration of orality and literacy, orally focused contexts necessitate oral methods for enabling participative engagement with

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<sup>76</sup> Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, p. 38

<sup>77</sup> Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, p. 50.



Scripture. However, Ranger remains correct that there can be no clear distinction between the two approaches to Scripture, for nowhere is beyond the bounds of orality. Though, as Mbiti proposes, oral methods of engagement with Scripture may atrophy through lack of use, they remain accessible to scholars as well as to the non-literate, and to everyone in-between.<sup>78</sup> Mbiti, as well as biblical performance scholars, reminds scholarship that the text of Scripture was written to be heard rather than read, though enaction as drama would probably not have been in the minds of its original ‘authors’ and tellers.

Embracing aspects of both the oral and the critical, I have suggested that devised biblical drama as an embodied form offers a third approach. Devising begins with a written text that can only be opened by someone who has the skill of reading, and requires a slowed-down approach to the text-as-it-is in order for the group working on the text to engage with what it holds explicitly. This can be seen as the art of criticality. As they move towards embodying the text, the group works increasingly with a remembered text in which they bring out what they see as important within the text in order to re-tell what it holds. This can be seen as the art of orality. In-between these tasks, the group has to use their imaginations to be able to reflect on the text in order to fill in what is implicit and also on what the text does not say, in order to make sense within the linear temporal and spatial nature of the narrative. This activity may be seen as fitting happily into the art of both criticality and orality, an interpenetration of the two approaches. However, the work of devised biblical drama does not end with a story re-told, but with a story re-presented. The third strand of the braid of drama is within the work of embodiment that remains woven into and interpenetrated by the approaches of both orality and literacy and that together bring the story into the here-and-now of a physical presence.

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<sup>78</sup> Mbiti, ‘Bible in African Culture’, p. 31.

Within this chapter I have set the scholarly context for my research within sub-Saharan Africa. Orally focused communities most naturally use oral means of engagement with Scripture. Scholars point to an indigenous use of drama as one among several creative tools of biblical engagement. Within biblical hermeneutics, biblical performance criticism offers a scholarly approach to performance as a means of interpretation. The literature from both areas supports my suggestion of the possibility of devised drama as a creative means of biblical engagement for orally focused communities. Yet, there remains a need to investigate more closely what takes place when devised biblical drama is used by ordinary orally focused Christians to engage with Scripture, and on what it has to offer the Church as a tool of interpretation and Christian formation. This is the work of the rest of this study.



**Part Two:**  
**Toward a Hermeneutic of Devised Biblical Drama**



## Chapter Five

### Creating Possibility through Memory's Beckoning Call:

#### Ricoeurian Hermeneutics and Scripture

When you are telling the story you release all that history. (John Gach Dak)<sup>1</sup>

What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities. (Paul Ricoeur)<sup>2</sup>

Together, *John Gach* and Paul Ricoeur encapsulate the power of telling whereby 'history' is liberated from the past. Only through release into the present may the past show its proposed world so that it may have present and future effect, forming the onward direction of its tellers and hearers. Ricoeur's concern for this possibility that evinces from telling is at the heart of my research. The purpose of this chapter is to develop the Ricoeurian theory underpinning the study to investigate what it means for my research to work with this view of Scripture as a dynamic telling of past, present and future.<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur proposes that Scripture, though a unique case, forms one particular instance of his more general philosophical hermeneutical theory, thereby calling forth criticism from those who insist on Scripture's absolute uniqueness.<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur's perception, that I here follow, is that

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group, Tuesday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102).

<sup>3</sup> For Paul Ricoeur's work on Scripture see for instance, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer, ed. by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> This point is made in several of Ricoeur's essays. For instance, see 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 103; 'Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics', in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by

through the temporal dynamic the remembering becomes a beckoning call for present imaginative engagement with its ‘proposed worlds’, so that communal and individual identity, values and beliefs are formed that may, to use Rowan Williams’ phrase, ‘extend my [and our] possibilities’ for faithful vocational living.<sup>5</sup>

Rooted within Ricoeur’s general hermeneutical theory, this chapter dialogues with two dramas from Gambella, both based on Luke 7: 18-23. Consideration of the dynamic of time, telling and tradition leads to a closer investigation of Ricoeur’s perception of the creation of possibility through the mimetic nature of telling. I earth his thought in specific reality by bringing the voices of the church leaders of Gambella into critical conversation with him, through their discussion of Bible-study. This leads into a closer consideration of Ricoeur’s account of the nature of Scripture in dialogue with alternative scholarly approaches that emphasise the uniqueness of Scripture, and through which I re-assess what it means to describe Scripture as the authoritative and normative ‘word of the Lord’, and of the relationship between revelation and testimony.

### **5.1 Two Dramatic Interpretations of ‘Are you the One?’ (Luke 7: 18-23)**

The Ricoeurian basis of this chapter is developed in dialogue with both the views of Scripture as presented by the church leaders of Gambella and also, as in each following chapter, with an illustration of their dramas. The ones used in this chapter were devised at

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Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 89-101 (pp. 89-90), ‘Philosophy and Religious Language’, in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans.by David Pellauer, ed. by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 35-47 (pp. 43, 47). For critique, see chapter one (pp. 47-49).

<sup>5</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 131-147 (p. 133).

my instigation by two small mixed-language groups in response to the Gospel reading heard at Morning Prayer.<sup>6</sup> Both were presented using mixed local languages.

<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So John summoned two of his disciples <sup>19</sup> and sent them to the Lord to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’

<sup>20</sup> When the men had come to him, they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”’ <sup>21</sup> Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind.

<sup>22</sup> And he answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.

<sup>23</sup> And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.’

Figure 5.1: Luke 7: 18-23 – ‘Are you the One?’

*The Prison’s* primary scene opened with a ‘guard’ standing immobile and blank-faced, pointing a stick representing a gun at the imprisoned ‘John the Baptist’, who sat on the ground boxed in by chairs. Two visitors arrived, one carrying a Bible. The guard turned with his gun to the men, who pleaded long and hard to be allowed to visit. Laughter erupted among the ‘audience’ (the other group and myself) as money changed hands. Indicating with his gun where the men were to wait, the guard collected John from his cell by kicking him, and used his gun to push him onto a chair. The guard’s gun remained aimed at John the Baptist throughout the visit. Deep conversation led to shared prayer, after which the visitors left. John was roughly pushed back to his cell and the scene ended as it had begun, and remained so during the next scene. In another section of the room ‘Jesus’ stood up, indicated by a white cloth knotted over his shoulder. Having been sent by

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<sup>6</sup> Morning Prayer Drama, Wednesday. For the place of these dramas amongst others considered in this work, see page 10.



John the Baptist, the two men approached Jesus. His gestures suggested the healings that formed the topic of conversation. The men returned to the prison where the activity with the guard was repeated, enabling the two men to relay Jesus' message to John.



Figure 5.2 *The Prison*

*Jesus the Healer* was primarily focused on 'Jesus'. In the first scene three men showed exaggerated ailments as the blind, the deaf and the lame. Jesus held his hands over the afflicted part, and as each man was healed he displayed instantaneous recovery and consequent joy. In the next scene, men told 'John the Baptist' of Jesus, and were asked to return to ask, 'Are you the one?' Jesus welcomed and listened to them, and healing another man, showed them their answer to John's question.



Figure 5.3 *Jesus the Healer*

## 5.2 Memory and Beckoning Call: Time, Telling and Tradition

Through their dramas the men had re-told the same passage of Scripture in two different ways, each emphasising different parts of the narrative, indeed *The Prison's* emphasis was on an inter-textually assumed setting.<sup>7</sup> Ricoeur perceives all telling as an imaginative and interpretative process that forms a temporal dynamic convergence at the heart of life, so affirming and developing Augustine's description of time as an experience of an encounter between three presents: 'The present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 11:2-6 parallels this passage.

expectation.’<sup>8</sup> For Ricoeur, humanity understands and interprets its existence in the face of this temporal dynamic that provides a reflective and constructive narrational means through which we tell life, so setting a projective path for the history-that-is-yet-to-be through its pictures of ‘proposed worlds’ unfolding in front of it. These tellings are re-descriptions of reality that invite the ‘inhabitations’ of engagement and response through which norms and values are judged, offering possibilities for transformed ways of seeing and of being that form our identity, so leading us on into the future.<sup>9</sup>

In this perception Scripture is the ‘telling’ of the remembrance of that on which Christianity is built, the Old Testament and Epistles, Acts, and Revelation, as well as the Gospels, inviting the hermeneutical task of present engagement through an imaginative sense-making in order that it may be a life-forming text for Christian discipleship, for individuals and within their church communities. Devised drama offers an experiential method to engage in this hermeneutical task that I suggest is particularly suited for orally focused church communities such as those in Gambella. The dramas of ‘Are you the one?’ had enabled the men to engage with the text by acting it out imaginatively as well as by discussing it. Though very different, both dramas offered values and hopes that form Christian identity.

Ricoeur denotes the ‘fictional’ character of the constructed nature of ‘telling’, whereby differentiated concepts of history and story begin to merge: ‘At first I am placed at a stage of human experience, which groping about, seeks a meaning: but this is an ill

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<sup>8</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI, 20, trans. by R.S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 269, quoted by Paul Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 20-33 (p. 31).

<sup>9</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, pp. 21-25.

wrought history, a history eaten away by discordances. It is only through transformation into well-made fictions that the effect of refiguration survives.’<sup>10</sup> The men of Gambella would probably agree, for ‘history’ is their English word to cover both concepts of fact and fiction. ‘Our stories’ are therefore ‘these’ ways of making sense among many other possible ways of understanding and telling, as seen in the very different dramas created from the one text. In this view, as Kevin Vanhoozer proposes, all stories are ‘far from being unreal and illusory’, but rather ‘the means of an ontological exploration of our relationship to beings and to Being’.<sup>11</sup> By extension, as anthropological exploration of being-in-the-world, I suggest that story intrinsically also has a metaphysical, and for a Christian, theological nature (even if what is presented has to be described as a-theological), for the triune God pervades existence. Within Scripture this is overt, and even where the text-itself is not a narrative, for it remains as part of the narrative of the larger Christian story.

For Ricoeur, story is also broadened, for tradition acts as a narrational text making coherent sense of the tension ‘between the efficacy of the past that we undergo and the reception of the past that we bring about’.<sup>12</sup> As tradition contains the memories of what has endured from the past and the projection of hopes for the future, societal telling of itself within the traditions of its culture forms the norms, values and ways of life that form cultural identity. This cultural telling of ‘tradition’ influences relationships both within the community and with those from beyond its boundaries who have and tell different stories. This can be illustrated by Dereje Feyissa’s account of tension between Anuak and Nuer

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative’, in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by David Wood (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160-187 (p. 180).

<sup>11</sup> Vanhoozer, ‘Philosophical Antecedents to Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*’, in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by David Wood (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), pp. 34-54 (p. 51).

<sup>12</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, p. 222.

‘stories’ in Gambella, and within the call of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia to the two ethnic groups to work in close co-operation with each other, seeking to transform the ethnic stories through the universal Christian one.<sup>13</sup>

As the past is recollected, transmitted and re-interpreted it offers dreams in the form of unfulfilled aspirations for a better world. Ricoeur posits this as a dialectic between ideology, as ‘a symbolic confirmation of the past’, and utopia, as ‘a symbolic opening towards the future’.<sup>14</sup> In terms of human flourishing this dynamic may be either positive, as it affirms identity and liberative purpose that beckons toward an ‘elsewhere’ that is ‘not-yet’, or conversely may be a ‘perverting’ negative that legitimizes inequalities and false hope.<sup>15</sup> In consequence, Ricoeur advocates a critical ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ as well as of ‘listening’: ‘It is always necessary to choose between the false witness and the true witness, between the father of lies and the faithful witness’.<sup>16</sup> To this end he calls for an ‘archaeology of the subject’, that enables ‘glimpses of desire’ through an interpretation of its symbols, in dialogue with a ‘teleology of the spirit’ revealing our sense of purpose and our eschatological ‘dependence on the sacred’, as seen in *Jesus the Healer*, where the

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<sup>13</sup> See above, pp. 84-85. Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), pp. 31-74; 214-215.

<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur, ‘The Creativity of Language’, in ‘Dialogues with Paul Ricoeur’, in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 17-36 (p. 29).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Hermeneutics of Testimony’, in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 119-154 (p. 146). See also, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 27, quoted by Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1992), p. 347.

desire for health and wholeness was shown as ultimately reliant on Jesus' touch.<sup>17</sup> Ricoeur suggests that it is only 'across and through the figures of false consciousness' we can come 'to the creative power of the imagination'. Ideology and utopia are mutually dependent on each other, for 'It is as though we have to call upon the "healthy" function of ideology to cure the madness of utopia and as though the critique of ideologies can only be carried out by a conscience capable of regarding itself from the point of view of "nowhere"'.<sup>18</sup> From the 'nowhere' of their drama, *The Prison's* contrast of the brutal prison guard and the 'Christian' visitors invited reflection on two differing ways of telling life.

Threading through many of Ricoeur's essays, the theme of liberation forms his teleological and eschatological utopian benchmark.<sup>19</sup> Writing in terms of Christian theology, Ricoeur ponders the essential relationship between remembrance and hope: 'Perhaps there would be no more interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and the Resurrection were effaced from the memory of mankind ...', for 'eschatology is nothing without the recitation of acts of deliverance from the past'.<sup>20</sup> Through the drama of *Jesus the Healer*, the remembrance of Jesus healing in the past is brought into the present, offering hope for the future. Yet, Ricoeur's philosophy of possibility and hope within interpreted existence cannot lead to the certainty of absolutes,

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Existence and Hermeneutics', in *The Conflict of interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 3-24 (pp. 22-24).

<sup>18</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Ideology and Utopia', *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 308-324 (p. 324).

<sup>19</sup> For instance see: Paul Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', trans. by Robert Sweeney, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 155-182; *Time and Narrative*, 3, p. 225; 'Ideology, Utopia, Faith', *Colloquy*, 17, 1975 (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 21-28 (p. 25); Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in Paul Ricoeur*, p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 63-100 (pp. 99-100).

but rather to theological ‘wagers’ made in the light of remembering and faith: ‘The root of faith is somewhere near that point where expectation springs forth out of memory.’<sup>21</sup>

Staying within Ricoeur’s account of the ‘general’ nature of Scripture as ‘poetic text’, his approach to tradition leads to his perception of myth as a foundational story that offers ‘a disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening onto other *possible* worlds which transcend the established limits of our *actual* world’, as *Jesus the Healer* had presented a proposed world of the health of eschatological wholeness, and where in *The Prison*, the loving concern of the visitors beckoned toward a better world, away from the brutality of the guard.<sup>22</sup> It is this world of possibilities opening up within the temporal and textual telling of the foundational stories of a community’s tradition that forms Ricoeur’s approach to Scripture. For Ricoeur, the textual nature of written discourse is fixed in form and distanced from its original setting.<sup>23</sup> The dramas moved the passage from Luke out of its ‘fixed’ form within scriptural tradition, without superseding it, for the canonical text remains, while the interpretative event of the drama passes within the contextuality of the present.

Though, as previously suggested, much of Scripture began life in an oral form, it has become through its textual form a semi-fixed and a-temporal tradition that has the authority of canonical status as *the* way of Christian telling of itself. Interpretation is a secondary form. However, the character of the canon as static tradition is necessarily far

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<sup>21</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Ideology, Utopia, Faith’, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur (his emphases), ‘Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds: an Interview’, *Dialogues with Paul Ricoeur*, in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 36-45 (p. 44).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation’, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 131-144 (pp. 139-140).

from absolute within its variations of early manuscripts and canon, its multiplicity of translation, and crucially, this is shown through its four differing Gospel accounts of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as exemplified by Matthew's account of the passage from Luke that does place John the Baptist in prison.<sup>24</sup> Despite this intrinsic movement away from the fixed nature of text, it remains distanced from its original situation of formation, so transferring its initial contextual particularity into a mode of the ideal and universal.<sup>25</sup> As a closed collection of what has been deemed essential to Christianity (whichever canon is adopted, and the situation within Gambella, where the Anuak had no vernacular form of the Old Testament, is a reminder that this canon may necessarily be an abbreviated one), Scripture, for the community who accord it this status, holds its memories, with their beckoning call to the future, through its telling of its foundational 'narratives' of many genres, with their norms and values, in order to have present effect upon its 'reader's' imaginations, and so carry the tradition from generation to generation towards the eschatological time of now-and-not-yet. The community whose telling formed its canonical Scripture is also the community that the canonical Scripture forms through its interpretative re-telling of that telling.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike the text-itself, Scripture's power of effect cannot be fixed in any way and nor, as already argued, have the Church's ways of interpretation. Ricoeur insists that understanding is always one way of telling a story amongst other possibilities, as displayed within the different 'tellings' of the two dramas. Interpretation remains open, always requiring fresh acts of configuration in the present. Such re-telling, and showing in the case

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 11:2-6.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', pp. 182-193 (p. 185), 'The Narrative Function', pp. 274-296 (p. 296), both in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, pp. 247-248.



of interpretation through drama, is made in the light of ‘wagers’ born out of a dialogue between text and ‘readers’, who are called to both listen, allowing the text to speak-for-itself, and to be suspicious of their own prefigurative prejudgements that might accord with false ideologies and utopias. Ricoeurian hermeneutics of listening and suspicion echoes an Ignatian account of discernment of spirits whereby individuals seek to understand what is taking place within their own soul through an exploration and developing awareness of spiritual consolation and desolation.<sup>27</sup> Accepting Scripture as a work of human authorship (while continuing to affirm its nature as divinely inspired), the call for suspicion and listening must also be reversed: suspicious of those human ideologies that are intrinsic and sometimes hidden within the text, and listening to the voice of our own consciences and humanity, for the Holy Spirit is at work beyond as well as within the formation of Scripture. In this view, critical listening to both text and self may lead to discerning interpretation.<sup>28</sup> Scripture’s own intertextuality and the ongoing dialogical flow of Christian Tradition are aids in this task.

### 5.3 Creating Possibility: Mimetic Telling

Ricoeur’s perception of tradition, time and telling forms the basis for his theory of the referential nature of our narrativel telling of life, and is built upon his understanding of

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<sup>27</sup> Saint Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. by Thomas Corbishley (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1963), 316-317, pp. 107-108. For contemporary use, see for instance, Gerard W. Hughes, *God of Surprises* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), pp. 91-103.

<sup>28</sup> For an example of ordinary ‘critical’ ‘reading’, see Nicole M. Simopoulos, ‘Who was Hagar? Mistress, Divorcee, Exile, or Exploited Worker: An Analysis of Contemporary Grassroots Readings of Genesis 16 by Caucasian, Latina, and Black South African Women’, in *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 63-72.

Aristotle's perception of *mimesis* as a creative imitation of human action.<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur proposes an underpinning symbolic imagination at work in the configurative process, for only so can we both produce and interpret our 'well-made fictions' that speak appropriately of reality and offer their possible worlds for interpretation and appropriation.<sup>30</sup>

As an imitation of action, *mimesis* is a symbolic telling referring to something beyond itself through its own being. The reality of the referent is not itself contained within the reality of the symbol; rather the 'imitation' forms a referential indicator. Drama is an overtly mimetic form of telling using the 'let's pretend' of physical embodiment and action. Seeking behind-the-text, the dramas refer to the scriptural text, and Luke 7 refers to an event within the ministry of Jesus. Though they are not actually what they refer to, paradoxically through their emplotment of the reality that is the reference itself (its combination of form and content) something of the reality of the referent is caused to be present within this symbolic form. Through its symbolism the reference, like metaphor offers a particular perception of and relationship with the reality to which it points. Ricoeur, following Aristotle's refutation of Platonic thought, insists that this imitative telling is not a carbon-copy that is a weakened trace of the referent. Rather, as a re-description, unique and separate, and therefore distanced from the original, reflective and imaginative creativity has to form the reference (symbol) as a re-description, so offering an interpretative more rather than less to our understanding of the referential reality through the opening up of new possibilities.<sup>31</sup> Yet, as making coherent sense is a form of framing

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 165-181 (p. 180); 'The Narrative Function', p. 292.

<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur, 'Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative', p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Ricoeur, 'Metaphor', p. 180; 'Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', p. 142.

of reality, while certain possibilities are placed in the foreground as essential, others will inevitably move to the background or be lost: 'Each interpretation, by definition, reduces this richness, this multivocity, and "translates" the symbol according to its own frame of reference.'<sup>32</sup> Within my illustration, *Jesus the Healer* had emphasized their display of healing as the answer to John the Baptist's Christological question, which was less clear within *The Prison's* foregrounding of John's assumed context, which yet offered its possibilities that were not present within *Jesus the Healer*. Mimesis is therefore the intentional production of a particular symbolic telling in response to the indeterminate 'imaginative variations' offered by the power-to-be of the everyday reality that is the referent as the producer of the reference seeks to express that reality.<sup>33</sup>

Our means of telling and interpreting therefore, is an inherently creative and imaginative act of re-presentation through the form and content of its emplotment.<sup>34</sup> Distanced from its particular origin, it offers itself as a reference to wider possibility that points less to the referent behind the symbol (the-world-of-the-author) and more as a draw towards the future through the referent that is the potential opened up by the symbol itself within the world-of-the-text. As this present reference is unfolded by the recipient its world, rather than that of the original, is disclosed for discovery, offering pictures of possible worlds which, in relationship with the world-of-the-'reader', enable re-figurations of reality that offer their own possibilities for transformed ways of seeing and of being. In terms of the dramas, they referred to their own horizon of possibilities more than they were

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<sup>32</sup> Ricoeur, 'Existence and Hermeneutics', p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle writes of *mimesis* within tragedy as 'an imitation of human actions which makes them appear better, higher, more noble than they are in reality', in Ricoeur, 'Metaphor', pp. 180-181; 'Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 21.

Luke 7: 18-23, just as Luke 7 is more itself than direct access to the event that lies behind it.

Developing Gadamer's work on the nature of art as play, Ricoeur proposes the mimetic nature of telling as one of 'heuristic fiction' where the playful reign of symbol (over author, work and reader) offers an imaginative reference that enables discovery through recognition, rather than as a didactic reference that leads to cognition.<sup>35</sup> According to Gadamer, the paradoxical nature of play is one of metamorphosis, where the transference of reality into the symbolic enables the emergence of an imaginative 'what is', so revealing reality's true being.<sup>36</sup> Within the imitative re-presentation, the everyday is distanced, allowing the world-of-the-text its own power, so that deeper realities may be exposed and faced – if the play is truly entered into. Huizinga had asserted the intensity and absorbing nature of play, and as Gadamer suggests, true play demands the whole-hearted engagement that means that the player will not only play, but will also be played by the game itself.<sup>37</sup> To the level that the hearer or 'reader' engages 'playfully' in the mimetic world of a narrative, they will be drawn into its imaginative world, participating as an 'imaginary me' in its universe.<sup>38</sup> The two dramas had enabled play with the text that differed for each group of men, the one as a contrast of violence and compassion through role-play of prison-visiting, and the other as a symbolic exploration of the joy and freedom that would evince from sudden physical healing.

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<sup>35</sup> Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', pp. 185-190.

<sup>36</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 102, cited by Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', p. 187. Gadamer's perception of play bears kinship with Johan Huizinga's account of play as 'significant' though 'different from ordinary life', *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1938 (London: Temple Smith, 1970), p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 21; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 102 (cited by Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', p. 186).

<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', p. 189.

Creative and imaginative interpretation is involved in the telling that forms both sides of the mimesis, in the making of the symbol and in its reception, for the account of these dramas is mine as receptor. The playful and absorbing activity of making-sense also makes incorporative sense of us and our world as we make sense of it. Ricoeur describes interpretation as a hermeneutical arc that moves the ‘reader’ from where they are to a transformed somewhere-else, via a process that oscillates between explanation of the world-of-the-text and an imaginative engagement with the possibilities of the world opened up in-front-of-the-text.<sup>39</sup> The mimetic process gathers the past within the present telling to form a forward-propelling hermeneutical spiral rather than circle for the productive and indeterminate creativity of the ‘imaginative variations on reality’ does not return to the sense from which it began. Through the power of the imagination, emergent meaning may open up developing and changing worlds-of-possibility, which through our engagement with them, act in relationship with our own worlds of reality in order to ‘shape our understanding of ourselves’. Where such an encounter of worlds takes place, it beckons us toward the future, and in the case of Christian Scripture, towards a faithful and purposeful living of life within a world suffused by the triune God.<sup>40</sup>

#### **5.4 Voices from Gambella in Dialogue with Ricoeur**

Ricoeur claims that his general hermeneutics of our mimetic telling of life provides an account of Scripture and its interpretation. However, discussion of Bible-studies with the church leaders of Gambella produced a very different account of scriptural interpretation,

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<sup>39</sup> For discussion of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc in relationship with devised biblical drama, see chapter six.

<sup>40</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Metaphor’, p. 181.

and thus of Scripture.<sup>41</sup> Their voices offer an alternative voice that in its distinct perception of Scripture offers a note of question into my own ready acceptance of the Ricoeurian viewpoint, as I seek to apply it to Scripture. This dialogue leads me into the final parts of my chapter in which I turn to Ricoeur's own view of the uniqueness of Scripture, which calls me into clarification of my understanding of what I mean by Scripture as the 'word of the Lord', one that I attest throughout the rest of my thesis is particularly appropriate on which to build my consideration of devised biblical drama.

In the Anglican Churches of Gambella Bible-study takes place at least weekly within every church, generally with open access, few Bibles, and incorporating non-readers and readers alike. As part of their regular engagement with Scripture, Bible-study offers a more informal and collaborative exploration of the text than that offered within the didactic nature of a sermon, for its participants sit in a circle for free discussion in the midst of prayer and hymn-singing. Yet, *Paul Puok Chol's* words, 'we come together to teach ourselves', though admitting a collaborative nature for the activity, suggests an emphasis on 'teaching' rather than on the Ricoeurian heuristic discovery that is more in accord with my own perception of the possibilities enfolded within Scripture, and that can be seen at work within their dramas.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps, at the basis of their method of Bible-study is the men's perception of Scripture as the divine word that they seek to know and understand, as summed up by *Paul's* account of its purpose: 'Why? We want to know the word of God. We will [use] these teaching for people to know the gospel: What is the meaning of the gospel? What it tell us.' In seeming contrast, Ricoeur's insistence on biblical hermeneutics as 'a *regional*

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<sup>41</sup> Focus group, final Monday. I do not suggest this as indicative of all Bible-studies.

<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur (his emphasis), 'Appropriation', p. 185.

hermeneutics in relation to philosophical hermeneutics' calls for Scripture to be treated *as any other text*, allowing its unique nature to emerge rather than forestalling what it holds by 'prematurely introducing existential [and I would add, theological] categories of understanding'.<sup>43</sup> Yet, Ricoeur's approach to all 'poetic text' as heuristic worlds of discovery also calls readers to take text seriously and engage their whole being in listening. For Ricoeur, it is in 'reading' Scripture as 'any other text' that allows this unique text that is Scripture to speak-for-itself.

Different understandings of the nature of the task lead to differing approaches to the text. Ricoeur writes of an imaginative sense-making and search for 'possible worlds', proposing an abundance of meaning constrained only by what he terms as the 'matter of the text' and a dialectic of listening and suspicion.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the church leaders spoke in more didactic terms of learning and gaining knowledge through clarification of what was puzzling, as they seek to hear, learn and understand the Lord's authoritative voice within the meaning of 'what it tell us' (*Paul*), that seems to assume a possibility of a definitive answer. If monovalent meaning is carried within the text, the question arises as to who has the authority to decide on the answer. *Girma Obang Olok* explained: 'If anyone miss his understanding, do not understand this word, the one who has knowledge will explain it for him'. Many of the church leaders were definitive in their approach to 'the one who have knowledge'. *Michael Anyar Garang's* comment was revealing for it pictures the stance of authority: 'He [the church leader] will stand up and summarize all the meaning, give the meaning to the people'. *John* provided further clarification:

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<sup>43</sup> Ricoeur, 'Philosophy and Religious Language', p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'The Task of Hermeneutics', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 43-62 (p. 62).

What we give to the church leader as his responsibility is to guide all those discussions, [...] after which you make summarize. This the meaning of making the summarize is to make clear in one understanding [...] because we need to be very careful in explaining [...] we just control what the Bible is meaning. That is why you can see that the church leader make summarize. Yes, and that summarize, anyone who may make misunderstanding will come and adapt his thought.

In their concern for definitive meaning and correct knowledge that is at odds with the notion of possible worlds, these reflections point to the importance that they place on their own authorized role in the process.

For the church leaders, there appears to be less concern for what the text may hold that could be available for all who read and listen, than to supervise its meaning in what Freire would describe as the ‘banking education [that] resists dialogue’, and which accords with their own educational experience of right and wrong answers (as discussed in chapter three).<sup>45</sup> Rather than a Ricoeurian exploration of possibility and faithful wagers as to meaning of an under-determined text, the church leaders of Gambella are concerned for correct interpretation under the authority of the Church in the person of the church leader - until they come to the activity of devising biblical drama. These perceptions of tradition are polarized. The espoused view of the church leaders seems to seek unchanging absolutes, while the operant form of their dramas, like Ricoeur seek less definitive imaginative and anticipatory worlds-of-possibility.

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<sup>45</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 56.



Emphasising the learning of correct knowledge that ultimately lay in their own hands, the church leaders of Gambella displayed little concern for the type of engaged and imaginative understanding that Ricoeur, and Williams with him believe leads to the manifestation of possibility that invites ‘readerly’ engagement with, entry into and inhabitation of fresh worlds that ‘extends my possibilities’ through their beckoning invitation.<sup>46</sup> I suggest that it is this emphasis on ‘correct’ interpretation that increases the men’s frustration and consequent demand for theological education, for they perceive the limits of their own knowledge and understanding. I believe they would have accepted Jo Bailey Wells’ critique (of the Sudanese Episcopal Church) that ‘those who deliver the answers sometimes do so authoritatively yet not knowledgably’, considering this ‘as his responsibility’ (*John*) within a situation where, as ordained and so authorized in their position of leadership, they had little choice.<sup>47</sup> While wanting to support these hardworking church leaders in their desire for theological education, the situation remains that here there is a discrepancy between Ricoeur’s insistence on engagement with textual possibilities to lead toward imaginative understanding, and their own assumption of learnt knowledge as cognitive understanding. Their play with text through drama accords more with Ricoeur than their own avowed perceptions as displayed within their discussion of Bible-study.

When concern is for correct cognitive meaning, Bible-studies do not encourage the imaginative, playful engagement with a text that encourages heuristic participation as an ‘imaginary me’.<sup>48</sup> This concern for the correct and singular can be seen as in contrast to Gerald West’s picture of oral approaches to Scripture as a creative developing form like

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<sup>46</sup> Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, p. 133; Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> Jo Bailey Wells, quoted by Ellen F. Davis, ‘The Bible in the Life of the Sudanese Church’, in *The Bible in the Life of the Church*, ed. by Clare Amos (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2013), pp. 73-87 (p. 77).

<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Appropriation’, p. 189.

jazz, for even if such a loose approach had formed the first part of their discussion, the church leader's contribution is of final closure.<sup>49</sup> Any dialogue and collaborative imaginative 'play' is replaced with the limits of their own learnt knowledge and understanding. While Ricoeur calls for a level of engagement that allows 'players' to involve themselves as 'imaginary me[s]', the church leader's didactic approach of proclaiming their own understanding disenfranchises the involvement of the 'imaginary me[s]' of the rest of their Bible-study group. Instead, they demand the obedient acceptance intimated within *John's* statement, 'anyone who may make misunderstanding will come and adapt his thought'. This can also be heard in *Peter Kuel Lul's* statement: 'We proclaim the word of God to be clear for everybody to change yourself to get salvation'.

Interpretation for Ricoeur cannot 'make clear in one understanding' as *Michael* demanded, or expect such an obedient response as *John* and *Peter* intimated, but must remain provisional, for it can only speak in terms of a wager, that 'this reading' is of a world-probably-belonging-to-this-text that invites rather than demands response. *Peter's* comment points to a possibility that different perceptions of ecclesiology may form a root of these different approaches to Scripture, for in terms of Avery Dulles' models, the church leaders' discourse suggests an heraldic basis, while Ricoeur's is more of a call and growth of a mystical communion.<sup>50</sup> However, when Scripture is described as 'authoritative and normative revelation', the heraldic church leaders' views perhaps seem more in accord than do those of Ricoeur and mine. The concepts demand closer investigation.

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<sup>49</sup> Gerald O. West, 'Indigenous Exegesis: Exploring the Interface between Missionary Methods and the Rhetorical Rhythms of Africa – Locating Local Reading Resources in the Academy', *Neotestamentica*, 36 (2002), 147-162 (p. 160).

<sup>50</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988).

### 5.5 Scripture: A Tradition of Time, Telling and Revelation

With Ricoeur, I have shown that the temporal and productive/creative nature of our interpretative telling of life intrinsically carries our memories of what-has-been in relationship with what-is as it looks toward the beckoning call and hope of what-could-be. Against this, I have placed the alternative voice of the church leaders' views on Bible-study that adds a note of question into using Ricoeur's perceptions as an account of making-sense of Scripture as a particular instance of his philosophical narrative - and so also of drama as a hermeneutical tool.

For the Church, Scripture is not the same as any other text, and here, I return to the discussion of theological and confessional interpretation (chapters one and three). Authorized by the Church, this text as opposed to others carries the weight of Church blessing and power as one that carries primary meaning and normativity for this community.<sup>51</sup> As a liturgical text that is proclaimed as 'the word of the Lord', Scripture is at the centre of Anglican church life, not as its own word, but as revelation carrying the authority of the triune God. Using Ricoeurian terminology, it forms the truth upon which this community has in faith fixed its wager, and so founds and finds its existence.<sup>52</sup> How legitimate therefore, is the activity of playing with God's own word through the imaginative and creative indeterminacy of drama?

Working with a Ricoeurian understanding of Christian Scripture demands that I take a fresh look at these concepts of revelation, authority and normativity that are carried

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<sup>51</sup> For instance see Robert W. Jenson, 'Scripture's Authority in the Church', in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 27-37 (pp. 30-34).

<sup>52</sup> This is not to say that Scripture is not foundational for all churches, but the specificity of my study is focused on the Anglican Church.

within the phrase ‘the word of the Lord’, to which discussion I bring John Webster, Kevin Vanhoozer and A. K. M. Adam to offer alternative and additional scholarly theological voices that cover different perspectives within theological interpretation.<sup>53</sup> Ricoeur considers the concept of revelation in several essays, specifically within ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’.<sup>54</sup> As already discussed, he proposes Scripture and its interpretation as firstly, a particular ‘regional’ instance of the revelatory, yet a-religious nature and function of all ‘poetic’ literature and hermeneutics *before* he allows himself to consider its unique character.

In contrast to Ricoeur’s general philosophical and hermeneutical approach, Webster calls Christians to consider Scripture as ‘Holy’, as ‘the human text which God sanctifies for the service of his communicative presence’, and so, as already discussed, he insists that ‘dogmatics does not allow the particular concept [...] to be folded into the more general category.’<sup>55</sup> Vanhoozer also seeks particularity before the general: ‘I am now inclined to pursue a theological *special* hermeneutic that recognizes [...] the ways in which the Bible is *not* read “like any other book”, for, “theological interpretation of Scripture is a matter of reading the Bible to hear the word of God”.’<sup>56</sup> The church leaders of Gambellla would agree. However, Vanhoozer qualifies this specific principle, commenting: ‘[I]nterpreters ought to read in order to grasp what the author has said and done.’<sup>57</sup> Despite himself,

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<sup>53</sup> John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Adam, ‘Poaching on Zion’, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon’, both in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 17-34, 51-93; Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in Paul Ricoeur*.

<sup>54</sup> Also see, Ricoeur, ‘Philosophy and Religious Language’, pp. 35-47. See also Williams’ development of Ricoeur’s essay on revelation, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, pp. 131-147.

<sup>55</sup> Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Vanhoozer (his emphasis), ‘Imprisoned or Free?’ pp. 60, 62.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

Vanhoozer offers a general principle of paying due respect to authorial rights, but that in the case of Scripture offers the unique author as God himself.

Unlike Webster and Vanhoozer, Adam insists on a general principle for reading, and one that places him close to Ricoeur, proposing that ‘our hermeneutics should begin from the general phenomena of semiosis, of meaning-making’.<sup>58</sup> This was also the approach of the men in devising drama. Ricoeur maintains that it is only by treating Scripture as any other poetic text that it may ‘first speak to my imagination, proposing to it the “figures” of my liberation’.<sup>59</sup> For Adam and Ricoeur, the respect that Vanhoozer demands to be paid to the author is to be paid to the text-itself, and it is this that will yield its theological and anthropological treasures. Yet, it is here that these writers’ diverse views begin to reach towards each other. While Vanhoozer seeks to give authority to the author, he finds the author within the text which Webster asserts is set apart for God’s ‘communicative presence’ (‘the word of the Lord’), and it is this communicative presence within the reference carried by the text that Ricoeur, with Adam (and Vanhoozer and Webster) seek to unfold and hear.

Webster proclaims Holy Scripture as the inspired and sanctified textual ‘word of the Lord’, whereby ‘creaturely processes’ and ‘realities’ are set apart for revelation’s ‘divine self-communication’, through which the divine saving action forms the ‘self-presentation of the triune God’, so attesting to his ‘ineffable presence’.<sup>60</sup> This perception is built not from how humanity makes sense of reality, and so of Scripture, but from belief in the nature and activity of God. Webster’s concern is that scholars, such as Ricoeur and

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<sup>58</sup> Adam, ‘Poaching on Zion’, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Webster, *Holy Scripture*, ‘Revelation’, pp. 11-17; ‘Sanctification’, pp. 17-30; ‘Inspiration’, pp. 30-39.

Adam, begin with the human activity of making-sense.<sup>61</sup> For Webster, Scripture comes *from God into* the ‘creaturely realm’, so ‘moving’ its human authors to write, and though what they write was not dictated, the Holy Spirit is seen as paramount in every part of the process.<sup>62</sup> Engaging with Scripture is thus perceived less as an act of interpretation than as an encounter with God through the text by means of ‘exegetical reason’s guidance’ and ‘a relinquishment of willed mastery of the text’.<sup>63</sup> Ricoeur’s insistence that explanation of the text is the necessary leading part of the oscillation between it and imaginative engagement (for ‘hermeneutics places the “thing” [‘matter’] of the text above self-understanding’), suggests this same relinquishment of mastery to the text, so that the ‘matter of the text’ may be encountered, for Ricoeur, within the imagination.<sup>64</sup>

Beyond his universal account of ‘poetic’ text, but working within it, Ricoeur assigns a unique character for the reference of Scripture, where ‘the intersection and vanishing point’ of all its discourse lies within the revelatory nature of its God-reference that he describes as the revealed yet apophatic ‘name of the unnameable’.<sup>65</sup> The God revealed within Scripture is, using unscriptural language, the ultimate that is at the heart of everything. In consequence, according to Ricoeur, Scripture is focused on questions of what it means to be human in the face of this God: who does not force himself on humanity, though on whom humanity is shown to be absolutely dependent; who is presented as relational, and yet ‘other’; who is hidden, and yet reveals himself, as at the burning bush as well as through the Incarnation and Resurrection; and to whom we, as humans are called to orient our lives in unconditional trust. It is a text of remembrance, of

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<sup>61</sup> Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 99.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp. 36-37.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>64</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, p. 101.

<sup>65</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 104; see also, ‘Philosophy of Religious Language’, p. 45.

how God has acted, and does act, and will act in relationship with his world.<sup>66</sup> It beckons its recipients into all-embracing new worlds of his kingdom that are focused on both particularity and generality, on the cosmic, the communal and the personal within ‘a new world, a new covenant, the kingdom of God, a new birth’.<sup>67</sup>

As both memories and beckonings are unfolded within this mimetic disclosure of new being that is the world-in-front-of-the-text they have a power of projection enabling them to break through into the very different world-of-the-‘reader’s’ reality, for what is ‘opened up in everyday reality is another reality, that of the reality of the possible’ that Scripture insists is a truer reality, for ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’.<sup>68</sup> Despite the contradictions of life and despite all Scripture’s own ‘paradoxes and discordances’ that constitute an ‘unresolved dialectic of memory and hope’, it is the unique focal point of the triune God within the ‘poetic’ nature of the text that holds Scripture together, enabling the multiple remembering voices to open up its horizon of eschatological hope that must not be given premature closure.<sup>69</sup>

While Ricoeur writes of God as Scripture’s ultimate reference, in-front-of-the-text rather than behind, Webster looks to God’s ‘spiritual presence’ behind, within, and beyond Scripture as ‘subject’. Both are concerned to maintain God’s freedom and mystery, for as

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<sup>66</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Philosophy of Religious Language’, p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, p. 96.

<sup>68</sup> Mark 1:14-15. Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 104; ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties’, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer, ed. by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 236-248 (p. 238); ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, p. 97; ‘Philosophy of Religious Language’, p. 45. Richard Bauckham also has concern that Scripture must not ‘impose premature eschatological closure’, ‘Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story’, in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 38-53 (p. 53).

Webster insists ‘revelation can in no way be commodified’.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to Webster, Ricoeur is concerned that the text itself is not seen as ‘holy’, or in Ricoeur’s term, ‘sacred’:

I was very reluctant to use the word “sacred” in my essay on revelation. I had to fight very hard to say finally what I believe, what I think, when I use the word “revelation.” But to an extent I am prepared to say that I recognize something *revealing* that is not frozen in any ultimate or immutable text. Because the process of revelation is a permanent process of opening something that is closed, of making manifest something that was hidden. Revelation is a historical process, but the notion of sacred text is something antihistorical.<sup>71</sup>

Like Webster, Ricoeur is eager to maintain that God has ultimate freedom, and I suggest that it is this that causes him to be cautious of containing him within the text: ‘Maybe in the case of Christianity there is no sacred text, because it is not the text that is sacred but the one about which it is spoken.’<sup>72</sup> It is the way in which the text is not ‘frozen’ that he sees as revealing. Ricoeur would agree with Adam’s comment on the ‘divine abundance of [Scripture’s] semiosis’ for God reveals himself continually within the telling within time that is never still.<sup>73</sup>

As a lifting of the veil, revelation forms a disclosure or showing enabling insights into that which previously had been unseen, or only dimly perceived, so forming a

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<sup>70</sup> Webster, *Holy Scripture*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘The “Sacred” Text and the Community’, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer, ed. by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.68-72, p. 72.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>73</sup> Adam, ‘Poaching on Zion’, p. 18.



manifestation rather than a verification of objective truth.<sup>74</sup> When viewed as a giving of absolute knowledge from an other-worldly elsewhere, the revelation of Scripture is perceived as verification of ultimate truth through the word of the Lord that directly inspired its human authors. This appeared to be the type of knowledge for which the church leaders of Gambella were seeking within their Bible-studies. Emphasizing God's presence within revelation, for Webster 'is as much moral and relational as it is cognitional', and he calls for faithful acceptance rather than reflection as he wonders 'whether imagination would be better replaced by faith as the readers' primary act'.<sup>75</sup> In contrast, Ricoeur writes: 'It is in the imagination that this new being is first formed in me.'<sup>76</sup> It seems that while Webster perceives divine presence arriving from above and of a sense being given, Adam and Ricoeur perceive divine presence as within and of sense being made via an imaginative engagement that is in accord with Ignatius of Loyola's conviction that God may be met within imaginative contemplation.<sup>77</sup> Webster, cautious of imagination does not say where he believes the divine presence to be perceived. In accord with his exploratory hermeneutical perspective, Ricoeur calls for imagination as response to the revelation within Scripture in order to engage with its 'proposed world [...] I may inhabit'.<sup>78</sup> Scripture, as a unique form of 'poetic' literature, therefore invites a relational engagement of participation-in or belonging-to the kingdom of God's world that extends the possibilities carried within the world of the everyday.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 96. See also Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', p. 131.

<sup>75</sup> Webster, *Holy Scripture*, p. 16, p. 99.

<sup>76</sup> Ricoeur, 'Philosophical and Biblical Hermeneutics', p. 107

<sup>77</sup> Hughes, *God of Surprises*, pp. 91-103.

<sup>78</sup> Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 102.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

This focus of Ricoeur on meaning rather than event gives Vanhoozer cause for concern, for he insists that the ‘theologian must be concerned with actual events that have universal significance’:<sup>80</sup>

Though he strives to overcome false dichotomies between fiction and history, in the end the Gospels achieve their theological importance in Ricoeur as works of creative imagination. Ricoeur never denies the factuality of the Gospel accounts outright, but it is primarily the meaning of the accounts that is of greatest human value. Such a weighted focus does endanger a theological realism.<sup>81</sup>

For Vanhoozer, the meaning is secondary to the world-behind-the-text, in its historical basis in an accomplishing event of redemption. Though he admits that Ricoeur ‘never denies the factuality of the Gospel accounts’ he is concerned that Ricoeur’s stress on the power of the imagination and the world-in-front-of-the-text leads to a gospel of ‘an always-already availability of the Christian possibility’ that overshadows the ‘particularity and contingency of the story of Jesus’.<sup>82</sup>

I have demonstrated throughout this chapter that Ricoeur is concerned with the telling of foundational events: ‘The event is our master. Each of our separate existences here are like those communities we belong to – we are absolutely dependent on certain founding events. They are not events that pass away, but events that endure.’<sup>83</sup> Ricoeur neither disallows for actual events or for Spirit-led interpretation of them. His concern is with the endurance of founding events that are accorded ultimate significance as sense is

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<sup>80</sup> Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in Paul Ricoeur*, p. 281.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 278.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 237.

<sup>83</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 114.

made of them by their reconfiguration through the telling, writing and re-telling that has accorded them their authoritative role within the life of the Church as the ‘word of the Lord’. The people of Gambella with their fluid concept of history/story would agree. Ricoeur does not deny the historical events, but his hermeneutical concern is focused on the interpretation of meaning of these events as we have them within the textual pages of the Gospels, and indeed the whole of Scripture, for this is the founding testimony that Christians beyond the spread of the oral tradition have been given. While holding to Scripture’s basis in founding events, like Ricoeur I remain aware that these, though in canonical form, are already interpreted, and interpreting Scripture forms one more, and necessary layer of re-presentation. My concern for what is contained within the text is for it to remain of continuing relevance for each and every place, in each and every generation.

Accepting Ricoeur’s view of revelation as the world that opens up in the imagination in front of Scripture, the ‘word of the Lord’ is less the inspiration of its authorship than the referent carried within the textual possibilities of its reference. The authoritative nature of the text is therefore less a demand for obedient acceptance of what has been given than a beckoning call, described by Ricoeur as a ‘nonviolent appeal’ for responding imaginative engagement with the memories it carries as its foundational world unfolded within our ‘reading’.<sup>84</sup> An authoritative text is a normative one calling for ‘a will that submits’ to its demands, as in the Gambella Bible-studies, while a foundational text, making a nonviolent appeal to the ‘imagination that opens itself’ to the possibilities of its world, instead beckons toward formative appropriation of its values and ideals within the world of the everyday, as in the Gambella dramas.<sup>85</sup> Thus, in the light of a Ricoeurian hermeneutic the words that may sometimes be used interchangeably: authoritative and

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<sup>84</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 95.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

foundational, normative and formative can also assume different approaches to the revelatory nature of the word of the Lord. As an authoritative and normative text, Scripture may be seen as an absolute text demanding obligation and obedience, as in the Gambella Bible-studies, while as a foundational and formative text, as in the Gambella dramas, it may be seen as inviting and beckoning. Imaginative formative engagement with the worlds opened up before foundational Scripture offers Ricoeur's nonviolent appeal and accords more closely with my own concerns and perception of the non-coercive ways of the God who forms the 'gravitational' pull at its heart.<sup>86</sup>

### **5.6 Revelatory Testimony**

Testimony is situated at either side of the revelation carried within the world-of-the-text: testimony, as interpretative telling, both formed Scripture and is also formed by Scripture through its appropriation within interpretation and within life itself. In this view, Scripture is the canonized testimony or witness of those who have been 'seized' by events that can only be made sense of through re-descriptions that place God at their centre. In ceasing to be events that pass they become instrumental in forming self-understanding, so 'transforming the accidental into our destiny'.<sup>87</sup> Such sense-making of a founding event, and subsequently of what has been deemed canonical leads to appropriation in re-descriptions forming witnessing ways of life, and is inherently a critical and dialogical act of reflective discernment that 'sorts and sifts' between what constitutes true and false testimony.<sup>88</sup> Ricoeur offers the principle that it is 'in forming predicates of the divine we disqualify the false witness; [and] in recognizing the true witnesses we identify the

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<sup>86</sup> Ricoeur, 'Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics', p. 98.

<sup>87</sup> Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 114.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

predicates of the divine’.<sup>89</sup> In other words, rather than acceptance of a pre-given set of truths, theological reflection forms a hermeneutical spiral of reflective discernment. Within their dramas the men had made an initial interpretation. In a subsequent drama of this passage to which continuing verses had been added, John the Baptist was taken out of prison, for the men felt that this had deflected from the main purpose of the passage.<sup>90</sup> *Michael* explained: ‘It seemed when we read the passage, we are giving [going] with the message. The message is about John’s ministry and Jesus’ ministry. This is what we realised the focus point.’ The initial dramatizations had formed a stage of interpretation, one interpretative wager leading on toward further wagers.

God is known and understood through the reflection and dialogue among the witnesses to his revelation of himself. Rowan Williams explores the implications of this for the revelatory nature of theological reflection, in an essay in which he develops Ricoeur’s account of revelation.<sup>91</sup> Beyond the import of the revelatory nature of the testimony of ‘the originary expressions’ of the community’s confessions of faith, Williams stresses that while it ‘manifests an initiative that is not ours in inviting us to a world we did not make’, it also insists that meaning is not ‘delivered to us from a normative elsewhere’.<sup>92</sup> Revelation and testimony, for Williams as for Ricoeur, lie in the relationship between event and meaning, ‘the hermeneutical process and the divine act’.<sup>93</sup> This is an intrinsic call for interpretation, for unlike Webster, Williams stresses the import of ‘debate, conflict, ambivalence, polysemy, paradox’, where faith is less an acceptance of a given than a questing ‘healing or life-giving *project*’, that he describes as ‘a proposal made in hope,

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<sup>89</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 115.

<sup>90</sup> Focus group, Friday.

<sup>91</sup> Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, pp. 131-147.

<sup>92</sup> Williams, p. 134. Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 73.

<sup>93</sup> Williams, p. 142. Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 114.

looking towards a future of shared life and shared struggle'.<sup>94</sup> Where there is greater concern for correct interpretation and knowledge, such as suggested by the Gambella church leaders attitude to Bible-study and by Webster, the ordinary 'reader' may be disempowered from participating in this 'shared struggle' of the 'life-giving project'. I have already shared Ched Myer's concern that ordinary 'readers' of Scripture must be freed to engage at depth with Scripture and to make their own interpretations, for though 'we may get things wrong, [...] we nevertheless have the right – and duty to struggle with these texts'.<sup>95</sup> Only so, can the engagement and appropriation be truly their own. In Gambella it was the dramas rather than the Bible-studies that enabled such freedom of engagement with Scripture.

Rather than certainties, revelation, as it embodies and offers its generative possible worlds-in-front-of-the-text that claim to be of universal relevance, may be seen to call for questioning dialogue as well as imagination as the Church seeks what it means to be the community who follows its pathways within each and every generation and in each and every context, for it 'must constantly be *shown* to be "at home" with all the varying enterprises of giving meaning to the human condition'.<sup>96</sup> While Ricoeur stresses the revelatory nature of the world-unfolded-in-front-of-the-text, Williams, developing Ricoeur's insights into the hermeneutical task, stresses the potential revelatory nature of the task itself, for 'God speaks in the response as in the primary utterance'.<sup>97</sup> The reflection and re-presentation that form the hermeneutical spiral of Christian interpretation through orality, text or devised drama, as through ways of living offer a vehicle for God's

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<sup>94</sup> Williams (his emphasis), 'Trinity and Revelation', p. 132.

<sup>95</sup> Ched Myers, 'Stories to Live By', in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses*, ed. by John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 33-38 (p. 34).

<sup>96</sup> Williams, pp. 142-143.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147.

continuing revelatory activity, calling for its further interpretation through a reflective, questioning response: Is this interpretation revelation? ‘If we live life like this has revelation occurred?’<sup>98</sup> In terms of the devised biblical drama of this study, the question could become: Does this re-presentation of the biblical narrative allow the revelatory image of God and his kingdom to shine through as testimony that enhances the Christian tradition as a way of following Christ? *The Prison* seemed to have acted as a call to faithful, pastorally-minded discipleship, while *Jesus the Healer* had looked to the eschatological liberation that beckoned its participants to a way of life that values such wholeness.

## 5.7 Conclusion

My account of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach has unfolded before me a mimetic world of possibility for the interpretation of Scripture that opens up Christianity’s foundational tradition. The world-of-the-interpretation forms its own ‘fit’ and ‘extension’ of the possible world within the world-of-the-text of Scripture as it offers its own testimony. Encouraging imaginative reflection on the memories of the past, they beckon toward the future, so that they may act as affective and effective formational calls to a life of faithful witnessing discipleship that follows its vocation towards the now-and-not-yet of the future within the kingdom of God. Ricoeur reminds his readers that interpretative activity takes place in the configurative dialogue between the revelatory possibilities of the mimetic world-of-the-text and the reality of the world-of-the-‘reader’, and Williams emphasizes that this interpretative activity may in itself also be revelatory. Ricoeur and Williams, at least within their scholarly writing, appear to assume a world of literacy and

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<sup>98</sup> Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, p. 135. Williams develops R. L. Hart’s work, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York, 1968), pp. 83-105.

criticality that could leave many within the Church outside the interpretative community. My task is to use a Ricoeurian account of hermeneutics to develop a clearer understanding of what is taking place when Scripture is interpreted through devised biblical drama, to see in what ways it enables the tellers 'to release all that history' (*John*) and so encourage imaginative interpretation through the 'inhabitation' of 'proposed worlds' (Ricoeur) for *all* within the Church.





## Chapter Six

### Making Sense through Devising Biblical Drama:

#### A Ricoeurian Hermeneutical Process

So, all the drama is remembering the things which happened in the past, and bringing it into the present time [...]. And they will see this thing which happens now, and people also learn on it here in the present. (Wilson Okello Akuay)<sup>1</sup>

Following my discussion of a Ricoeurian approach to Scripture, this chapter uses a Ricoeurian hermeneutical framework to investigate the interpretative processes engaged in when devising biblical drama. Paul Ricoeur's account of a hermeneutical arc that forms our means of 'telling', and to which *Wilson* bears witness in his description of drama, is a dynamic of the past being brought into the present so that it might direct a pathway into the future. The Morning Prayer dramas devised in response to Jesus' teaching on John the Baptist (Luke 7: 24-35) form illustration and conversation partners. Offering dialogical voices of comparison and contrast, I also bring the dramatized interpretations into conversation with formal voices of the interpretative work of a range of scholarly biblical commentators.<sup>2</sup> The chapter is structured around the stages of Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc, leading from prefiguration, through configuration to refiguration. Carrying affinities with

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<sup>1</sup> Morning Prayer Drama, second Monday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Martinez offers a specialist work on this particular passage, *The Question of John the Baptist and Jesus' Indictment of the Religious Leaders: A Critical Analysis of Luke 7: 18-35* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011). The other two are from general commentaries designed to be used by those who preach, the first from the United States and the second from Africa: R. Alan Culpepper, 'The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections', in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9, ed. by Leander E. Keck and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 1-490 (Luke 7: 24-35, pp. 162-167); Paul John Isaak, 'Luke', in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. by Tokunboh Adeyemo and others (Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 1203-1250 (Luke 7: 24-35, pp. 1217-1218).

Ricoeur's work and specifically designed to engage with the dramatic form, Patrice Pavis' schema for analysing drama as a 'model spectator' is also brought to the conversation.<sup>3</sup>

*Wilson's* account of devised biblical drama mirrors a Ricoeurian hermeneutic of 'telling'. Yet, rather than the past experience itself, it is the mimetic telling of the memory, that through its embodied presence as drama, opens up its own possibilities, and is fundamental both for the ways in which we interpret reality, and its consequent effect upon the ways in which we live our lives. In terms of 'reading' Scripture through devised drama this means that rather than Scripture itself, what is offered is the 'Let's pretend' of its re-telling, forming an interpretation through the changed medium of drama. Within the last chapter I noted the contrast between the church leaders' approaches to Bible-study and to biblical drama. They appear to seek to manage the activity of their Bible-studies so that univocal 'correct' meaning could be established among their congregations, while their dramas show less of a concern for establishing right belief. *Wilson's* conception of drama, indicative of the conversation of all the men is suggestive of this approach. What matters here is to re-present in embodied form the there-and-then that is held within the pages of Scripture that it might speak for itself here-and-now as it beckons toward the future within the kingdom of God, for it is by such 'remembering' that 'they' (I interpret this as covering both those who make the drama and those who see it) are enabled to 'see', 'learn' and follow the beckoning call of Scripture.

### **6.1 The Dramas of 'Jesus' Teaching on John the Baptist' (Luke 7: 24-35)**

The dramas forming the chapter's illustration were devised by two mixed-language groups in response to a reading at Morning Prayer (Thursday) in which Jesus teaches the

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<sup>3</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*, trans. by David Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 252-258.

crowds about John the Baptist (Luke 7: 24-35). The illustrative dramas used in the last chapter were based on the preceding passage. Unlike that one, this has little perceivable narrational content for it consists of a section of Jesus' teaching to the crowds. The dramas were presented in English.

<sup>24</sup> When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>25</sup> What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces. <sup>26</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> This is the one about whom it is written, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

<sup>28</sup> I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.'

<sup>29</sup> (And all the people who heard this, including the tax-collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, because they had been baptized with John's baptism. <sup>30</sup> But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves.)

<sup>31</sup> 'To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? <sup>32</sup> They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep."

<sup>33</sup> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, "He has a demon"; <sup>34</sup> the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" <sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.'

Figure 6.1 Luke 7: 24-35 – Jesus' Teaching on John the Baptist

### 6.1.1 *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*

This drama, of three separate scenes forms my primary illustration. The focus throughout was on activity rather than dialogue. The men left the specific narrative setting

of the passage to the last scene, forming the first from the creativity of their imaginations in dialogue with other passages from Luke's Gospel, and the second from intimations about John the Baptist's ministry that are carried within Jesus' teaching.

The first scene contrasted two groups, offering a comic scenario introducing the context of their drama. Two 'tax-collectors' sat behind a table, in front of which the other three queued, representing religious leaders paying their taxes. With all the lack of hurry of bureaucracy, the tax-collectors worked together to bully the religious leaders into paying more than they had anticipated, in goods as well as money. The tax-collectors gleefully split their takings between themselves, setting only a small portion aside for the Romans. Apart from when being specifically addressed by the tax-collectors, the religious leaders turned away from them, engaged in their own conversation. Though annoyed and frustrated by the tax-collectors, the Pharisees were displayed as buoyed up by their own sense of superiority and purity that viewed the tax-collectors as beneath their notice, despite the fact that these men robbed them of their material wealth.

The second scene opened with John the Baptist preaching. The contrasting characters from the previous scene formed two small separated groups listening to his message with great interest. John's message was displayed as enticing for, listening intently, the two pairs moved towards him and so also closer to each other until they formed a circle around him. They sat with John the Baptist, seemingly forming one group. The tax-collectors brought out a large plate and imaginary food from their bags, inviting the Pharisees and John the Baptist to share in the meal. The Pharisees turned away in contempt, while John gestured the others to eat, gently saying, 'No, I only eat locusts',

drawing laughter from ‘the audience’, partly within their shared recognition of the inter-textual clue (Matthew 3: 4, Mark 1: 6).

The third scene presented the narrative setting of the passage through a parallel picture to the previous one repeating much of its action. A white-clad Jesus taught, listened to by the same two groups. In response to the charismatic message the separate pairs were drawn ever closer to Jesus. Again, they sat together, the tax-collectors bringing out their plate and ‘food’. Again, the Pharisees moved back out of the circle, making exaggerated faces of disgust. Here the parallel was broken, for in contrasting movement to the Pharisees, Jesus leant forward, blessed the ‘food’ and eagerly joined in the meal (as in the photographs on the next page).<sup>4</sup> The drama concluded with a remembered version of Jesus’ saying of verses 33-34.

This drama offered the men’s interpretation rather than the Lukan passage itself through converting the collection of teachings into a framework that told a story. As interpretation, their drama, in Ricoeurian terms forms a ‘fictional’ way of ‘remembering’ both the scriptural passage and the events to which it refers through focusing on differing responses to the justice and purpose of God: ‘And all the people who heard this, including the tax-collectors, *acknowledged the justice of God*, because they had been baptized with John’s baptism. But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers *rejected God’s purpose* for themselves’ (verses 29-30).<sup>5</sup> These verses were made present within the drama’s parallel scenes.

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<sup>4</sup> Photographs illustrating the dramas include the whole group, for they were taken on the following day when one drama was developed incorporating the whole passage, Luke 7: 18-35.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Discussion: Ricoeur on Narrative’, in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by David Wood (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), pp. 160-187 (p. 180).

Figure 6.2 *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors: Responding to Jesus*



Pharisees Display Cautious Interest in the Lively Discussion (above)



Pharisees Move out of the Fellowship as the Food is Blessed (above)



A Pharisee Displays his Disgust (left)

Alan Culpepper ignores these verses, designating them as ‘a narrative aside.’<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Roberto Martinez views them as ‘seminal’ for interpretation of Luke’s theological perspective on the ‘plan of God’, forming closure for John the Baptist’s ministry, while foreshadowing the religious leaders’ increasing alienation from Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the overtly ‘narrative-critical’ interpretation of Martinez and the narrational approach of the drama of *Pharisees and Tax-collectors* offer similar ways of framing this passage of Jesus’ teaching.

### 6.1.2 *Jesus the Teacher*

Paul Isaak treats verses 29-30 as part of Jesus’ teaching, as it was also dramatized in *Jesus the Teacher*.<sup>8</sup> Jesus wandered, sometimes stationary, sometimes moving, all the while speaking to men who walked with him, listening intently to his every word, through which he presented the teaching of the passage within a remembered oral form.



Figure 6.3 *Jesus the Teacher*: The Avidly Listening Crowd

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<sup>6</sup> Culpepper, ‘Gospel of Luke’, p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> Martinez, *Question of John the Baptist*, pp. 189-190.

<sup>8</sup> Isaak, ‘Luke’, p. 1217.



## 6.2 The Hermeneutical Arc of Narrativial Discourse

The configurative task of interpretation (or ‘telling’) is described by Ricoeur as a hermeneutical arc ‘extending from naïve understanding to informed understanding through explanation’.<sup>9</sup> This arc can be extended, rooted in both past and future of the present-world-of-the-‘reader’, as in my diagram below.<sup>10</sup> I envisage this as a bridge, a ‘place of initiative’ taking interpreters from prefiguration within their ‘space of experience’ to their new world of refiguration through appropriation within a ‘horizon of expectation’ via the exploration of the world-of-the-text that forms the arc of the configurative process.<sup>11</sup>

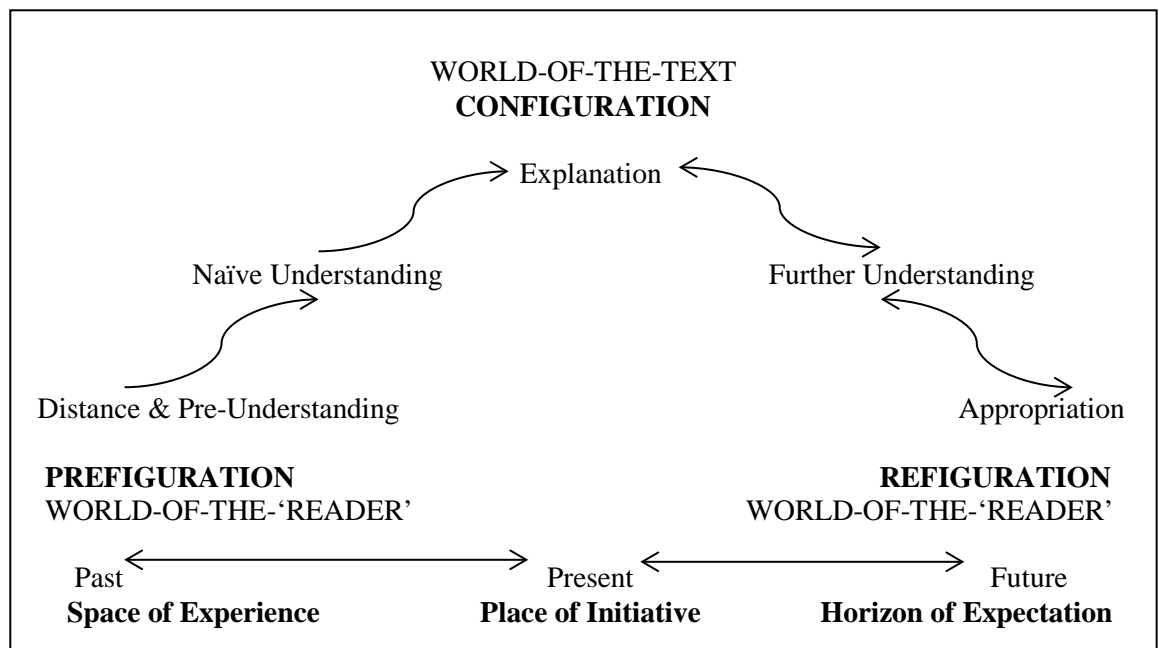


Figure 6.4 Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Arc

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Explanation and Understanding: On Some Remarkable Connections between the Theory of Texts, Action Theory, and the Theory of History', in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 125-143 (p. 130).

<sup>10</sup> Allan Bell comments that Ricoeur gives his hermeneutical arc no definitive form. I follow Bell's lead in bringing together and interweaving elements from many different essays, 'Re-constructing Babel: Discourse analysis, hermeneutics and the Interpretive Arc', *Discourse Studies*, 13 (2011), 519-568 (p. 526).

<sup>11</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 208.

Devised biblical drama enables ‘readers’ to perform the configurative (‘authorial’), task of interpretation, through presenting the telling held within the scriptural text within a new format by which the words of the text are translated into a material, embodied, enacted form. Rather than having concern to seek any world lying behind-the-text, refigurations of biblical narratives seek, using Ricoeur’s words, to ‘reactivate what is said by the text’.<sup>12</sup> The refiguration has two forms. Firstly, the reconfigured telling of Scripture is shown within the product of drama that holds and offers what can be seen of the interpretation that has taken place, as within my example of the two dramas. Secondly, the appropriated interpretation is incorporated within the life of faith of the ‘readers’, deviser/performers and audience (the following level of ‘readership’), and of their community. This, having no immediate outward form is less open to analysis, and has to remain a matter of conjecture.

My use of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical theory to interpret drama rather than text has been enriched through engagement with Patrice Pavis’ model for analysing drama.<sup>13</sup> Though Pavis is interested in the ‘*model spectator*’, and I am concerned with the interpretative process of ‘reading’ Scripture that is involved in the authorial work of the *making* of drama, we are both concerned with the nature of the interpretative process as it relates to the form of embodied performance. To make sense of Pavis’ work for my own research, I look at it as through a mirror reflecting back on the process of formation, rather than forward to its reception. Pavis’ complex schema of spectatorly ‘reading’ of performance is directly developed from Umberto Eco’s work on the ‘model reader’ of

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics’, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 165-181 (p. 164).

<sup>13</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, pp. 252-258.

narrative, offering its own links with Ricoeur's theory of 'reading'. Ricoeur's concern to integrate both explanatory and imaginative (further understanding) approaches to text is paralleled within Eco through engagement with what he describes as intensions (what is held within the Ricoeurian world-of-the-text) and extensions (the Ricoeurian world-in-front-of-the-text that is the world of engagement between the world-of-the-text and the world-of-the-reader).<sup>14</sup> My use of a Ricoeurian hermeneutic, informed by Pavis and Eco is synthesized within my diagram below, and amplified within later diagrams. With its greater complexity, this model can no longer be displayed as a bridge (figure 6.4), taking a 'reader' from one place to another, but here follows a simplified upward, vertical movement that enables the complexity of the inter-related differentiation between the world-of-the-text and the world-in-front-of-the-text to be shown. Borrowing Eco and Pavis' terminology, my concern is the 'model reader' (who may not literally be a reader) who interprets Scripture as part of a group of deviser/performers through the dramatic form, thus becoming 'authors', or perhaps better, 'playwrights'. I remain earthed by my engagement with the actual biblical dramas of Gambella.

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<sup>14</sup> Pavis uses Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula: Le role du lecteur ou la cooperation interpretative dans les textes narratifs* (Paris: Grasset, 1979). I have used Eco's Introduction to *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, and his essay 'Lector in fabula: Pragmatic Strategy in a Metanarrative Text' in the same work (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 3-43, 200-260. Eco's 'hierarchy of operations' builds upon Janos Petöfi's semiotic model of *Text-Struktur Welt-Struktur Theorie*, Eco, pp. 13-14.

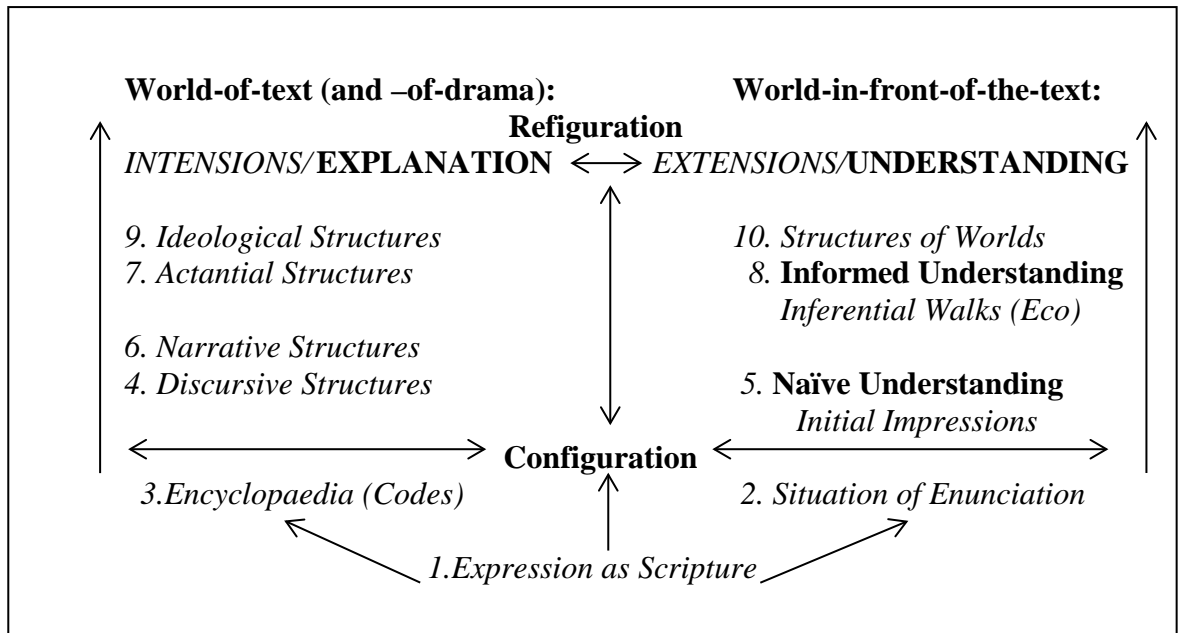


Figure 6.5 Summary: Ricoeurian Hermeneutics (**bold**), extended by Eco/Pavis (*italics*)<sup>15</sup>

Pavis introduces Eco's schema as incorporating the 'full range of the parameters of reading – psychological, ideological, and semiological'.<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur's arc implicitly contains this 'full range', but is less prescriptive, for his concern is with the universal way in which the dynamic works, rather than in its precise content. Their separation of stages of interpretation must not be seen as an exact science, for both the differentiated stages and Eco's 'intensions' of Ricoeurian 'explanation' and his 'extensions' of Ricoeurian 'understanding' are often simultaneous and are inextricably intertwined. However, it remains helpful to view the interpretative process through its constituent parts in order to investigate these more closely, while remembering that in reality they are not so neatly differentiated. My diagrams, opening each following section, form a synthesis containing explanatory quotations from Ricoeur (specified within footnotes) in combination with my adaption of the Eco/Pavis schema. These are designated within numbered boxes and are referred to within the text as they form the basis for my discursive analysis.

<sup>15</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 254; Eco, *Role of Reader*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Pavis, p. 252.

### 6.3 Prefiguration: Distance and Pre-Understanding

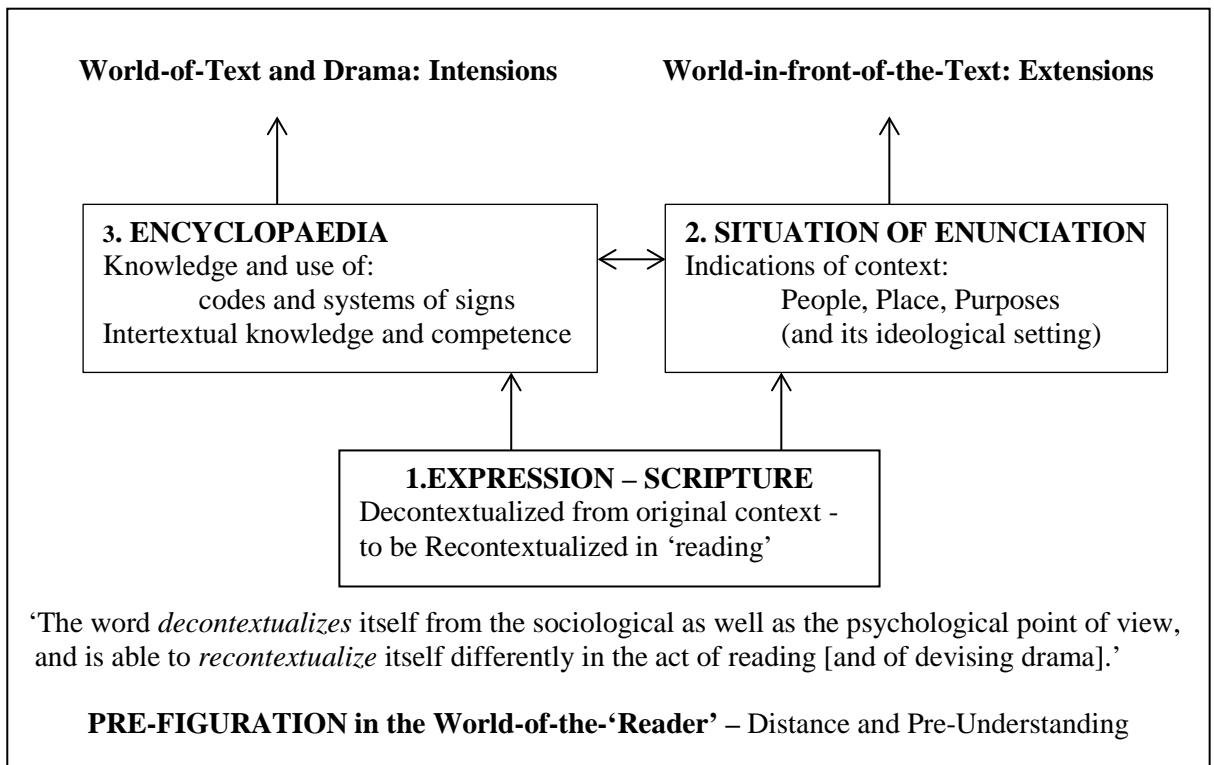


Figure 6.6 Prefiguration (Ricoeur/Eco/Pavis)<sup>17</sup>

The codes and symbols used by the author form the communication within the text needing to be decoded by the 'reader'.<sup>18</sup> Like Roland Barthes, Ricoeur wishes to announce the 'death of the author' (box 1), arguing that written text is a distanced medium of communication in that it becomes a-temporal, a-contextual and autonomous, necessarily distanced from its author's original intentions for its original 'readers' within their social context.<sup>19</sup> 'Exploding' any containment within the world-of-the-author, the world-of-the-

<sup>17</sup> Paul Ricoeur (his emphases), 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 63-100 ((p. 91); Eco, *Role of the Reader*, pp. 14-23; Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, pp. 252-255.

<sup>18</sup> Pavis, p. 253, p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 131-144 (p. 139). Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977),

text offers its wider possibilities.<sup>20</sup> Yet, still carrying what has been placed there by the author who has created its 'world', s/he cannot be eliminated from the text and gains a 'fictitious' place within it, that is also fed by a 'reader's' prior knowledge of author and context.<sup>21</sup> In passing their work into the public domain authors have no choice but to step away, giving a work its autonomy.

With Scripture the situation is yet more ambiguous in that the text is perceived as the 'word' of the Lord who continuously has present effect on the world through the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, it remains appropriate to view the text as autonomous, distanced from its original human authors and audiences. Accepting Ricoeur's view of God within Scripture as 'the intersection and vanishing point' of all its reference, revelation is through the text-itself, rather than within the world-behind-the-text.<sup>22</sup> The text is therefore set free in a world on whom God did not and does not force himself, but whose inspired and inspiring word can be found and heard within the possibilities offered by the world-of-the-text and within the world-of-the-'reader' within which God offers his continuing presence.

Within its textual nature Scripture remains distanced from any possible 'readers', autonomous and dormant until it is opened, though holding its potential for fresh audiences within their contexts. The text, built up from a series of signs has potential agency that can only become active within dialogue with 'readers' in recontextualized form: 'The work

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pp. 142-148. See also Robert Morgan, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', p. 139.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 182-193 (p. 188).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102).

*decontextualizes* itself, from the sociological as well as the psychological point of view, and is able to *recontextualize* itself differently in the act of reading', when it speaks and engages productively with and for its contemporary 'readers'.<sup>23</sup> 'Readers' also have agency through the power of interpretative decision making, which in making drama is affected by the change of form.<sup>24</sup> 'Readers' do not come as blank canvases before a text, but bring the multiple traditions of their own cultural setting and all that makes up their own individual and communal holistic experience (spiritual, ideological, psychological and social, emotional, cognitive and physical) that leads to stance, knowledge and opinions (box 2).<sup>25</sup> Eco reminds how ideological presuppositions and biases affect the way in which texts are received.<sup>26</sup> 'Readers' also bring their own 'encyclopaedia' of knowledge and systems of codes and signs (box 3), and use another set to transform their 'reading' into drama.

For the Anglicans of Gambella, Christianity, the Anglican Church and their rural Sudanese/Ethiopian, refugee/non-refugee status and their particular ethnic context form both their interpenetrating culture and the ways in which they 'read' Scripture (box 2), as seen within their approaches and attitudes towards both Bible-study and drama. 'Reading' from this place, as *John* declares 'release[s] all that history' from within the text for its new context. The 'death of the author' awaits the birth of the 'reader', but it is not as a new-born but as those who carry their own prefigured world.

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<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur (his emphases), 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Morgan, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 270-271.

<sup>25</sup> Pavis writes of 'the subject's inscription in the social fabric', *Analyzing Performance*, p. 251.

<sup>26</sup> Eco, *Role of Reader*, p. 22.

Christian ‘readers’ may already ‘know’ the particular passage being dramatized, as well as having wider inter-textual knowledge and competence (box 3). Their ‘reading’ will also be affected by their prior assumptions about this foundational text that is the ‘word of the Lord’. Engagement within the confessional tradition forms pre-understanding and a pre-judgement that in its preconceptions might deflect from consideration of the text-itself, but also may aid understanding. For those devising *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*, their inter-textual knowledge provided opportunity to flesh out the text. Having found their key within its contrasting characters (verses 29-30) the group devised contextual background, ‘to make more easily for understanding’. They did not specify which particular passages formed their inspiration but probably used other Lukan material. The Parable of the Tax-Collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18: 9-14) shows the self-righteous Pharisee looking down at the sinful tax-collector, and the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) contains inferences about the way of life of tax-collectors, as well as portraying Zacchaeus’ response to meeting Jesus. Their remembered Scripture enabled the group to make an intertextual engagement that enriched their characterization, so adding to the sense that they made of the specific passage, but through enaction as well as discussion.

In dramaturgical decision-making, the world-of-the-‘reader’ dialogues with the mimetic reference of the world-of-the-text, through which the configurative task of making the mimetic reference of a drama develops. Pre-understandings and pre-judgements are formed from the inter-relationships of this specific group of interpreters in their context, including their ideological and Christian framework and any pre-conceptions of the particular passage. They use the ‘semiological coding’ of their ‘Let’s pretend’ form of telling to create their specific drama, seen through men acting as characters within stories,



and the convention of a white costume for Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Distance between text and ‘reader’ remains only until the text is opened and to the degree of engagement with what the text contains. This, for Ricoeur is the hermeneutical text-based task of configuration.

#### 6.4 The Configurative Task

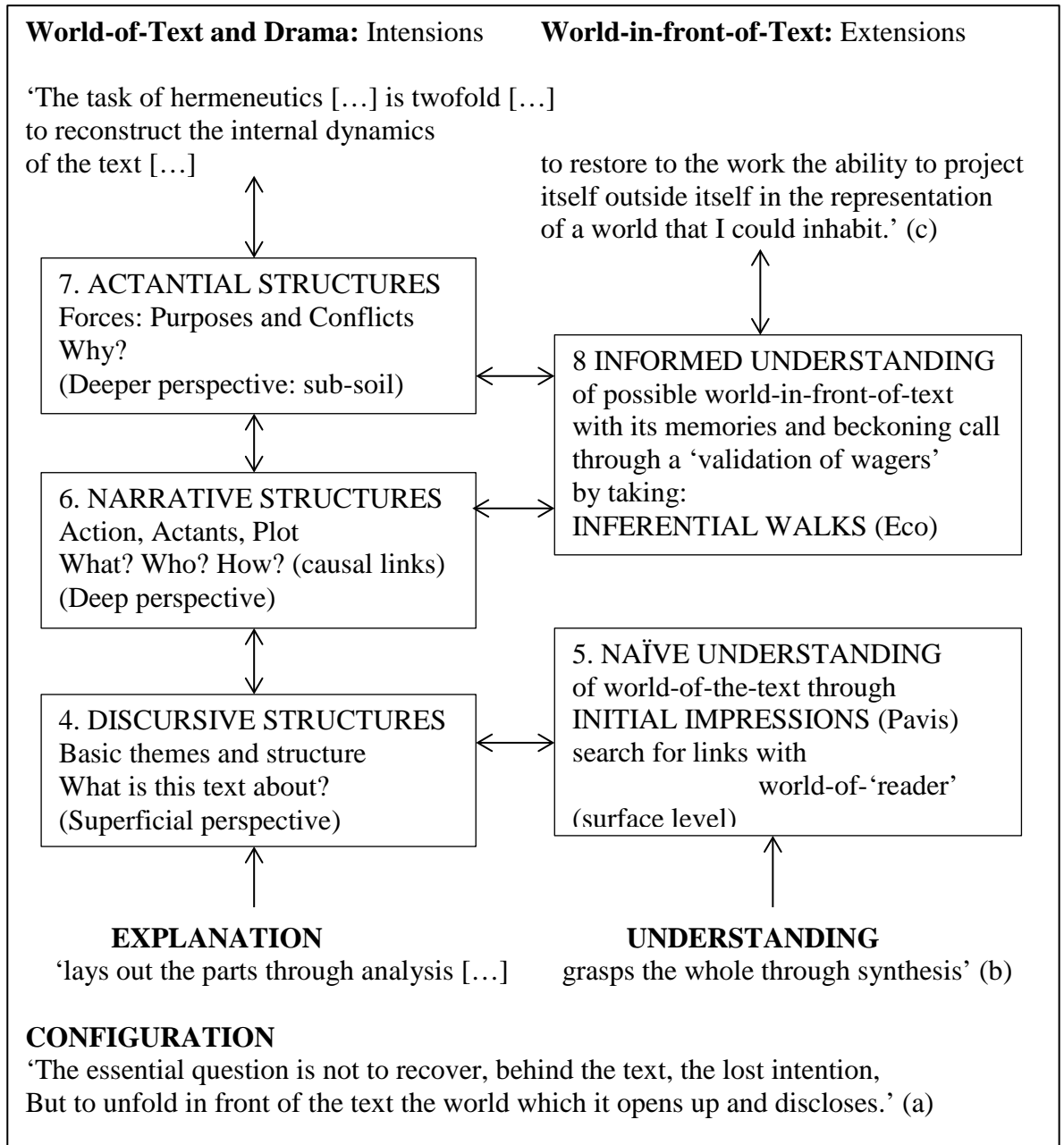


Figure 6.7 Configuration (Ricoeur/Pavis/Eco)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 255. For conventions of costume, see chapter seven.

The hermeneutical task is focused on what is held within the text that Ricoeur describes as a ‘requirement’ addressed to its recipient: ‘[I]nterpretation is a kind of obedience to this injunction starting from the text [...] What has to be interpreted in a text is what it says and what it speaks about, i.e., the kind of world which it opens up or discloses.’<sup>29</sup> As with all interpretation, devisers of drama have to place themselves in front of the text in order to unfold and reveal the representation of reality of the world that lies within. Only so may it be perceived as a ‘world that I could inhabit’.

#### 6.4.1 Naïve Understanding

Naïve understanding is gained from an initial encounter with a text (boxes 4 and 5). Based on first impressions, Ricoeur views this as an initial wager that *this* is what the text is about. This initial interpretation is not yet a ‘reading’ that has unfolded what is contained within the words and structure of the text to disclose the fullness of its world, but rather a first ‘guess’ that is a precursor to the greater depth of informed understanding, that Ricoeur suggests can only be developed through the analytical task of explanation, for, ‘if there are no rules for making good guesses, there are methods for validating those guesses we do

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricoeur, a) ‘Phenomenology and Hermeneutics’, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-128 (p. 111); b) ‘Explanation and Understanding’, in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 71-88 (p. 72); c) ‘On Interpretation’, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 1-20 (p. 18); Eco, *Role of Reader*, pp. 14, 23-37; Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, pp. 254, 256-257.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language’, in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work*, ed. by Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 86-93 (p. 90).

make'.<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur writes as a critical scholar. My task is to follow Ricoeur with ordinary Christians making devised drama in mind.

Watching the drama of *Jesus the Teacher* I wondered whether there had been little venture beyond a naïve approach to the passage, for there was no indication from their performance that the group had engaged with it at any greater depth, though discussion may have taken place that did not reach the drama. The drama itself suggested that the group had made an initial decision that the passage was about Jesus teaching, and that the 'crowd' of the passage were those who wanted to hear him, for all the characters were equally engrossed, listening solemnly to everything that Jesus had to say. There was no exploration of the content of the teaching *within* the drama. The other group's more creative approach to the passage enabled them to make *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors* a drama that was more exploratory of what the passage contained. The physical form of the drama showed signs that the men had indeed begun to wrestle with what the passage was saying. The interpretative task of turning Scripture into drama encourages devisers to engage in textual explanation to lead to the understanding that is shown within a performed drama. Yet, where there is no narrative to guide the devising task, a comparison of the two dramas of *Pharisees and Tax-collectors* and *Jesus the Teacher* suggests that there may be a need for an initial imaginative and creative interpretative leap from someone within a group of devisers to see practical dramatic possibilities within the text to act as a stimulus for the making of a narrational form of drama that tells a story through its action.

#### 6.4.2 Explanation

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<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur, 'Explanation and Understanding', *Interpretation Theory*, p. 76.

Explanation for Ricoeur develops naïve understanding, enabling further explanation that developed, leads to yet greater depths of understanding, and so to yet further explanation, and so on ... Ricoeur posits the two as complementary, progressive though oscillating, dynamic and reciprocal rather than as disparate approaches, for while in ‘explanation we explicate or unfold the range of propositions and meanings’, in ‘understanding we comprehend or grasp as a whole the chain of partial meanings in one act of synthesis’.<sup>31</sup> Explanation is the work of dissection on the world-of-the-text-itself and has ‘the scientific character of validation’ while the work of understanding explores the world-in-front-of-the-text in relationship with that of the ‘reader’ and comes from the imaginative ‘genius of guessing’.<sup>32</sup>

Careful analysis, for Ricoeur, enables the text to speak for itself. Unlimited interpretative possibility is limited through a validation of developing wagers made as to the ‘matter’ of the text. The clues for this work are embedded nowhere other than within the text itself, containing at once both ‘a permission and a prohibition; it excludes unsuitable constructions and allows those which give more meaning’.<sup>33</sup> The drama of *Pharisees and Tax Collectors* suggested this oscillation had taken place within the men’s preparatory discussion, for the drama developed once they had begun to engage in the dissecting work of explanation by noting and working with the characters presented within the passage.

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<sup>31</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Explanation and Understanding’, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text’, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 197-221, (p. 212).

<sup>33</sup> Ricoeur, *Metaphor*, p. 175.

Ricoeur, as perhaps influenced by the socio-historical context of his scholarship, assumes the method of structural analysis, yet for him (as also for Eco and Pavis) this is cautioned by an insistence that the text refers to an 'external world' beyond itself.<sup>34</sup>

Ricoeur writes as a philosopher for fellow academics and does not concern himself with the difficulty of critical analysis for those who have had no training in the ways of scholarship, let alone for those who cannot read. Yet, his phase of explanation is a process of closer investigation, for this is what structural analysis is: a means of investigating a narrative through the exploration of its structures that are seen as following universal patterning.<sup>35</sup> Pavis, following Eco, indicates deepening investigation through layers leading from the discursive structures 'at the surface of the text' (box 4), through narrative structures (box 6), actantial structures (box 7) and, 'at the deepest and most secret level', ideological structures (box 9).<sup>36</sup> These are described by Ricoeur as taking place within 'three levels of actions, actants, and narration', more readily understood as do-ing, do-ers and the way of 'telling' through a plot.<sup>37</sup>

My question is not as to whether this stage of explanation is necessary to move the 'reader' towards greater depths of understanding than is present within an initial naivety. My concern is rather as to whether there are ways of exploring the text for ordinary

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<sup>34</sup> Don Ihde makes this point of Ricoeur in his editorial introduction to *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. xi. For Ricoeur's own perception, see for instance, 'Existentialism', p. 90; 'What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 145-164 (p. 155); 'Model of the Text', p. 216. Eco, *Role of Reader* (p. 14), followed by Pavis also assume structural criticism in their accounts of the intensions of the text, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 254.

<sup>35</sup> For an account of Structural Criticism, see John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996), pp. 104-139.

<sup>36</sup> Pavis, pp. 256-258.

<sup>37</sup> Ricoeur, 'What is a Text?', p. 157.

Christians to perform the explanatory task other than those requiring scholarly critical training, and within the parameters of this study, for those who come from orally focused communities such as Gambella.<sup>38</sup> Scholars, of course use their critical training to investigate through many other means than that of structural analysis. Indeed, Ricoeur himself saw possibilities beyond structural analysis, and using terms that give hope for the non-critically trained, he suggests that the explanation that is reached through textual analysis is, in oral discourse arrived at through a process of question and answer that elucidates the speaker's meaning.<sup>39</sup>

Ricoeur's description of a process of question and answer seems to have arrived back at the discussion within my third chapter with Fowl and the official documents of the Anglican Communion and its *Bible in the Life of the Church* report who propose that the way to greater depth of understanding of Scripture is reached through 'debate and discussion'. Yet, such methods favour critical literacy rather than the more circuitous approaches of orality where meaning may be elucidated through a communal cyclic telling and re-telling (chapter four). Such an approach, incorporating apposite songs, prayers and straightforward application, though an alternative approach to one of question and answer within a discussion of meaning, may still follow a Ricoeurian 'injunction of the text'. These oral methods are in contrast to the Gambella Bible-studies where question and answer seem paramount in the concern for 'correct' interpretation under the authority of the Church, in the person of the church leader. Here, normative answers seem of greater

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald West and other proponents of 'reading with' suggest one task of the biblical scholar is to facilitate the use of critical questions with ordinary 'readers' of Scripture, in 'Reading the Bible Differently: Giving Shape to the Discourse of the Dominated', in *"Reading With": An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible: African Overtures*, ed. by Gerald West and Musa W. Dube, Semeia 73 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 21-42.

<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur, 'Explanation and Understanding: Some Remarkable Connections', p. 129.

import than following a route offered by questioning the text. Christians may be inclined to interpret with pre-conceived assumptions given to them by their present understanding of the tradition and so may find it hard to move beyond the engagement of naïve or given understanding to dig more deeply for themselves into what the text-itself contains, and may thereby miss the treasure that is held more deeply within the text.<sup>40</sup>

In terms less closely tied to that of structural analysis, and as might be used by the ordinary ‘reader’ of Gambella, explanation might be described as investigation through a first stage of narrational questioning (box 6): of what was done (action), of who did it (actants), and of how it was done that leads to the causal linkage between them that always seeks concordance rather than discordance (the plot of the narration).<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, asking the question ‘Why?’ of what has been discovered (box 7) leads towards greater levels of criticality.<sup>42</sup> Pavis reminds his readers that they may not want to slavishly follow the actantial analysis of structural analysis.<sup>43</sup> However, by following Eco’s complex and differentiated layering Pavis does offer a reminder that the ‘why’ may be buried beneath the surface level of the text, within the purposes and conflicts that make up narratives.

The question remains, however: can drama form an alternative means of engagement with Scripture that enables the work of explanation through these questions of what, who, how, and one might add when and where, before moving to the greater depth of

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Ricoeur writes of the problem of ‘prematurely introducing existential categories of understanding’, ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 89-101 (p. 95).

<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 20-33 (p. 21).

<sup>42</sup> Shimon Bar-Efrat ‘explains’ narrative via analysis of narrator, characters, plot, use of time and space, and style, in *Narrative Art in the Bible*, trans. by Dorothea Shefer-Vanson and the author, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 256.

why? In fact the change of medium from text to drama could actually encourage this deeper engagement with the text, as dramaturgical choices have to be made in response to what is actually held within the text.<sup>44</sup> It was clear from *Tax-Collectors and Pharisees* that investigative discussion had taken place, for the group had done more than discover which characters lay embedded within the content of Jesus' teaching. Their drama sought to answer the questions, 'what, who, how, and why' to explain and explore the relationships both between the two groups, and with Jesus and John the Baptist, using what they found within the textual account of Jesus' teaching.

Drama remains a narrational form of telling through its format of doing and showing, and uses characters and action within a causal sequence of events that seeks to make sense of temporal events.<sup>45</sup> Within devised biblical drama this is clearly more straightforward when the passage to be translated into dramatic form is a narrative itself, as the men had found on the previous day's Morning Prayer Drama (Wednesday) based on Luke 7: 18-23 of 'Are you the one who is to come?' In devising these dramas of *The Prison* and *Jesus the Healer*, the men had followed the narrative of the text as they showed John the Baptist's disciples toing and froing between John and Jesus. That each group chose to use a differing focus for their drama indicated what, within the brief time-scale allowed for the activity, had first caught their attention. Had the groups had more time and more people they might have also expanded on differing aspects of the narrative that each had left unexplored.

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<sup>44</sup> Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, p. 256.

<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', pp. 21-22. Helen Nicholson describes drama as 'a narrative art', in *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 63.



In dramatizing a section of Jesus' teaching (verses 24-35) the task was less straightforward. The drama of *Jesus the Teacher* had used the passage's structural narrative but this did not help the group to delve dramatically within the content of the teaching. On the other hand, the drama of the *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors* developed once they had taken note of the characters within the passage: 'Some of us will be tax-collectors and some of us will be intellectuals' (verses 29-30).

Having made this decision the group mined the passage for what it contained to help them explore these two groups of characters, the tax-collectors who had accepted the 'justice of God' and John's baptism and the Pharisees who had not. These two verses with their narrational recall, together with their sense of narrative lying behind the penultimate saying of fasting and feasting became the key for the narrative of their drama:

For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say,  
'He has a demon'; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say,  
'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!' (verses 33-34)

These sections of the text answer a question of 'what?' The answer to 'how?' can be seen within the way the group built on this so that their drama formed a developing narrative of the transformation of the tax-collectors who listened and responded to John and Jesus that was contrasted with the rigidity and lack of transformation of the Pharisees who heard the same teaching. Beyond the narrative structures arrived at through the questions of 'What?', 'Who?' and 'How?' the group's closer reading had enabled them to begin to look at deeper questions of the 'Why?' of purpose and conflict shown within the relationships of the

drama. Thus, I suggest that *Pharisees and Tax-collectors* demonstrates that careful dramatized ‘reading’ of a narrative can fulfil the interpretative function of textual explanation that Ricoeur had perceived as reached through the route of structural criticism.

At the end of our week of drama, *John* commented on the relationship between Bible-study and drama, ‘Without Bible-study a drama cannot come. So the drama can be a drama, need to know the process and characters in the Bible. Bible will lead you until the end of the drama.’ *John* suggests that the explanatory part of the process of discovering plot and characters is what enables the drama to be formed, and so in Ricoeurian terms to ‘unfold in front of the text the world which it opens up and discloses’. *John* seemed not to notice the other half of the interpretative dynamic, that of the use of the interpreter’s own imagination and understanding.<sup>46</sup> Yet, this had clearly taken place, for without this more imaginative stage of exploration of the world-in-front-of-the-text, the men could not have developed their drama. For Ricoeur, explanation forms just one segment of the hermeneutical process (Eco’s intensions of the text), and it is within the next segment of informed understanding (Eco’s extensions of the text) that Ricoeur’s own theoretical use of imagination comes to the fore.

#### **6.4.3 Further Understanding** (box 8, figure 6.7, p. 200)

Explanation, for Ricoeur, was never as an end in itself, which he described as ‘a sterile game’, but rather forms the analysis that ‘unfolds’ what lies within ‘the matter of the text’ to enable the world-of-the-text to be fully and deeply heard.<sup>47</sup> Reaching toward an understanding of this disclosure (the world-in-front-of-the-text) is the second half of the two-fold hermeneutical task of ‘restor[ing] to the work its ability to project itself outside

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<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Phenomenology and Hermeneutics’, p. 111.

<sup>47</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Explanation and Understanding’, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 87.

itself in the representation of a world that I could inhabit'.<sup>48</sup> This task of 'restoration' calls for the engagement of imagination as well as of intellect to reveal the possibilities of this particular interpretation of the world-of-the-text.

A Ricoeurian dialogue is aided by the distance of the text from the 'reader' that calls for imaginative and critical engagement. Here, I return with Ricoeur to the mimetic world of reference and of play within 'heuristic fiction' that calls for imaginative discovery by the 'reader' rather than purely cognitive acceptance, questioning or refusal of a teaching.<sup>49</sup> Due to the distance between the worlds, and the fact that the world-of-the-text is in the imagination rather than within the literal reality of the here-and-now, the 'reader' has to play with what the world-of-the-text has to offer, for, as Ricoeur proposes, the 'reader' is 'invited to undergo an imaginative variation of his *ego*'.<sup>50</sup> This task has to be followed for oneself. Others cannot play for you and it is only to the level of engagement with the unfolded world-in-front-of-the-text that one can be 'played by the game itself'.<sup>51</sup> That devising *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors* enabled a group of men to engage and play with a passage from Scripture suggests that a communal engagement is possible, developing through the co-operative activity. The drama of *Jesus the Teacher* seemed not to have enabled this imaginative engagement, perhaps because the group had played less with the passage.

For Ricoeur, the French *sens* usefully has the double meaning of both 'sense' and of 'path' or 'direction'.<sup>52</sup> This allows him to say that, 'the text seeks to place us in its

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<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur, 'On Interpretation', p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', pp. 189-190.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 189.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 186.

<sup>52</sup> Bell, 'Re-constructing Babel', p. 545.

meaning, that is – according to another acceptance of the word *sens* - in the same direction [...] to interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text, to place oneself *en route* towards the orient of the text.’<sup>53</sup> The imaginative engagement of following this path is described by Eco through the similar analogy of taking an ‘inferential walk’.<sup>54</sup> Through such venturing it becomes possible to discover the ‘representation of a world I could inhabit’. The task of dramatization is to portray physical representations of such worlds that we could inhabit, bringing the two worlds of text and actuality into a close juxtaposition with each other.

When dramatizing a narrative, devisers need to move beyond the text itself in using their imagination and understanding of a passage to appropriately fill in gaps of emotion, action and dialogue that are not included within the narrative but which are implied or left to the ‘reader’s’ imagination. After dramatizing *The Prison* and *Jesus the Healer*, both groups pondered the problem of why John the Baptist needed to ask of Jesus, ‘Are you the one who is to come?’ for they felt that it affected the manner in which they played both John the Baptist and his disciples.<sup>55</sup> A narrative text therefore has to interact with the devisers’ own worlds of consciousness, of their experience and their imagination, for them to be able to decide how they will display the imagined acts of the drama’s plot.

In order to make their drama of *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*, and with no clear narrative to help them, the devisers still had to work within an interaction between their own world and that perceived within the text to build an embodied world-in-front-of-the-text. While preparing their drama, *John* called for the productive and synthetic task of

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<sup>53</sup> Ricoeur, ‘What is a Text?’, p. 161.

<sup>54</sup> Eco, *Role of Reader*, pp. 31-37

<sup>55</sup> This question also puzzles commentators, Martinez, *Question of John the Baptist*, p. 1.

Ricoeur's stage of 'further understanding': 'We want to generalize the main concepts of this message'.

The clue for their devising work had been found within Luke's explanatory input at the centre of the passage (verse 29-30). Using intertextual clues to help explain their characters the group used their imaginations and creativity to devise the comic first scene of their drama displaying the tax-collectors and Pharisees abusing each other. The tax-collectors gained riches at the Pharisees' expense, while the Pharisees displayed their self-satisfied and arrogant contempt of the tax-collectors. Each 'group' treated the other as 'other'. As their audience, we laughed at this scene that was performed as a comedy of types of fallen humanity, recognizing within its humour our own experience of the world and the daily difficulties of being human.<sup>56</sup>

This scene formed the background for the men's engagement with the content of the passage that was shown within two scenes using the Pharisees and the tax-collectors as their drama's main characters. The second relationship of the passage, between John the Baptist and Jesus was displayed within the drama through the parallels of their two scenes, the first focusing on John the Baptist and the second on Jesus. Martinez makes the same point, writing of a 'narrative parallel' that Luke has 'so carefully crafted between John and Jesus'.<sup>57</sup> The passage begins with the charismatic crowd-captivating nature of both Jesus, who 'began to speak to the crowds', and John, through Jesus' question of the crowd, 'What then did you go out to see?' (verses 24-25). Each scene of the drama showed the Pharisees and tax-collectors listening and then being drawn as if towards a magnet, firstly to John the

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Weitz, *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> Martinez, *Question of John the Baptist*, p. 180.

Baptist, and then to Jesus. However, coming to see was displayed as one thing; listening and responding another. Luke records that the ‘tax-collectors acknowledged the justice of God’ and were baptized, unlike the Pharisees (verses 29-30). Within the drama there were no baptisms, but rather a symbol of conversion, for within each scene the tax-collectors were now eager to share their food with those whom they had previously extorted. In contrast, and again the action was repeated in each scene, the exaggerated refusal by the Pharisees of the tax-collectors invitation displayed that they still ‘rejected God’s purposes for themselves’ (verse 30) and so were unable to join in the fellowship of the shared meals.

Surrounding the short Lukan narrativel explanation (verses 29-30) that had given the group their clue for their drama, Jesus’ teaching is made up of a ‘cluster of sayings’. These sayings form Isaak and Culpepper’s sole interest and this approach may have caused the problems of dramatization faced by the group who produced *Jesus the Teacher*.<sup>58</sup> At first sight these had been ignored within the men’s dramatization of *Pharisees and Tax-collectors* that used a narrative to convey ‘the general idea’ and ‘the main concepts’ of this passage. Yet, on closer inspection I suggest that the men had included interpretation of at least some aspects of each section of teaching within the narrative of their dramatization.

John’s asceticism, described within the opening saying of the passage (verse 25), was given dramatized form in his unwillingness to engage in the conviviality of fellowship, ‘No, I only eat locusts’. His preaching, that was ‘more than [that of] a prophet’ prepared the way for Jesus (verse 27). Culpepper elucidates this through displaying its inter-textual resonance, concluding: ‘John was great; Jesus was greater’.<sup>59</sup> Within the drama this was

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<sup>58</sup> Culpepper, ‘Gospel of Luke’, pp. 162, 165; Isaak, ‘Luke’, pp. 1217-1218; Martinez, *Question of John the Baptist*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Culpepper, p. 164.

shown literally, for it was the scene with John the Baptist that ‘prepared the way’ for the fulfilment of the last.

Fulfilment was displayed by the drama within the parallels that were developed with abundance. John had watched the tax-collectors eat, but held back from joining them. By blessing the food and moving in to eat from a common plate, Jesus formed a ring of close fellowship with the tax-collectors, from which the Pharisees in their self-pride emphatically excluded themselves, for fellowship with such perceived sinners did not accord with their world-view: ‘We played the flute for you and, and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not weep’ (verse 32).<sup>60</sup> The teaching of Jesus was presented as accepted or rejected through a willingness to draw into the one community of which Jesus was not only head (he was the one who blessed the food) but also demonstrably as a full participant as he accepted and shared in the meal offered by social outcasts (verses 33-34). The men’s dramatization is closely in accord with Isaak’s comment: ‘Approaching God’s word with an attitude that “I am perfect” means that one misses the greatest of blessings.’<sup>61</sup> The men showed this physically, for the tax-collectors were metaphorically blessed as they drew toward Jesus to eat, while the Pharisees rejected that blessing by moving away, as demonstrated in the photographs (page 190).

Commentaries see the passage culminating in the final proverb (verse 35):

‘Wisdom is vindicated by all her children’.<sup>62</sup> David Ford comments: ‘Wisdom is immersed

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<sup>60</sup> Culpepper gives three interpretations of this parable, suggesting the interpretation within the drama as ‘the most acceptable’, ‘Gospel of Luke’, p. 166; see also, Isaak ‘Luke’, p. 1217. Martinez, *Question of John the Baptist*, p. 196.

<sup>61</sup> Isaak, p. 1217.

<sup>62</sup> For instance: Culpepper, p. 167; Isaak, p. 1218.

in history and at the same time oriented towards its fulfilment'.<sup>63</sup> The drama ended on a picture of hope and expectancy within its partial fulfilment, where its lack was demonstrated by the Pharisees physically removing themselves from fellowship with Jesus as well as the tax-collectors. The children of wisdom were not shown as those who believed themselves to be pure (the self-satisfied, self-righteous Pharisees), for they had not recognised the 'justice of God' (verse 29), but rather were shown, beyond John and Jesus themselves, as the converted, but not down-trodden tax-collectors. They had acknowledged the 'justice of God' and now respond to their experience of Jesus within eager discussion and by offering food to be blessed and shared amongst all who will join them with Jesus, within the joy and fellowship of the now-and-not-yet of the fulfilment of the kingdom of God. Joachim Jeremias writes of the inclusive eschatological import of Jesus' meals in a way that resonates with the world-of-possibility of the men's embodied dramatization: 'The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.'<sup>64</sup>

The drama had presented a physical 'inferential walk' along the pathway opened up by the text to offer its possible world that 'we could inhabit' as an embodied presence. The work of devising and the acting of the drama enabled a physical and experiential engagement in Ricoeur's 'matter of the text'. Those playing tax-collectors experienced what it was to draw together in table fellowship. Those playing Pharisees experienced what it was to withdraw away from it. The material form of the experienced experiment in interpretation through drama places the two worlds, -of-the-text and -of-the-'reader' in a

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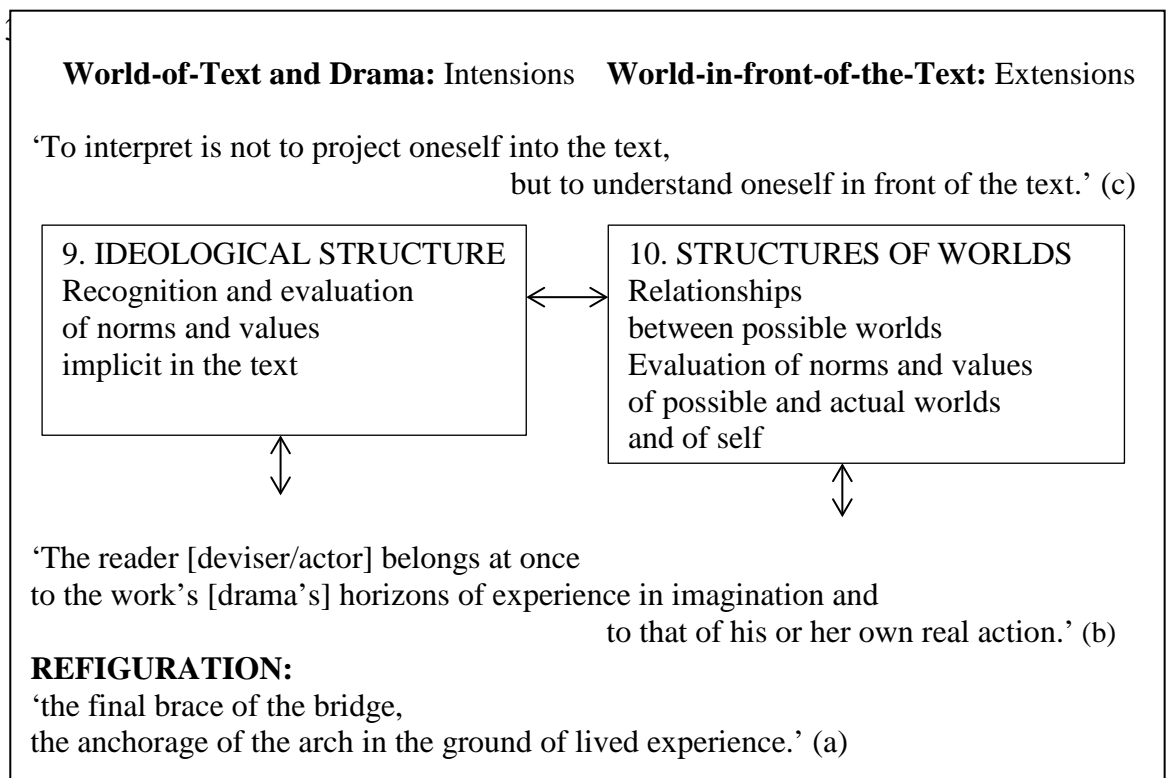
<sup>63</sup> David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 116.



relationship where each throws light onto the other. Yet, this world that has been created through the drama remains a hypothetical physical representation of the text as a Ricoeurian interpretative provisional wager rather than holding the full essence of the scriptural passage itself. The drama was its own self as the understanding of the text that these people in their own particular circumstance made at this specific point in time. Here-and-now, ‘this drama’ is the interpretation of ‘this biblical narrative’. It may have had a different focus at some other time, in some other place, and for some other purpose.

## 6.5 Refiguration: Appropriation

Figure 6.8 Refiguration (Ricoeur/Eco/Pavis)<sup>65</sup>

Analysis is not the end purpose of textual exploration, nor yet is any resultant understanding. The end purpose for Ricoeur is what this configurative stage leads to

<sup>65</sup> Ricoeur, a) 'What is a Text?', p. 124; b) 'Life in Quest', p. 26; c) 'Metaphor', p. 178; Eco, *Role of Reader*, pp. 14, 37-39; Pavis, *Analyzing Performance*, pp. 254, 257-258.

through a dialogue between the world-of-the-text and the world-of-the-‘reader’ that will enable the appropriation of the text, described by Ricoeur as ‘the final brace of the bridge, the anchorage in the ground of lived experience’.<sup>66</sup> Ricoeur does not anticipate a straightforward adding-on of the world-view of the text to that of the ‘reader’, though it offers its ‘readers’ ‘a new way of looking at things’.<sup>67</sup> Nor yet, that any ‘readers’ ‘read’ their own world into the text, for Ricoeur insists that ‘to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text* [...] exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the possible existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed’.<sup>68</sup> The important point is that a dialogue takes place where the two worlds meet and interact with each other, so that ideological judgements may be made of the norms and values of self, world and text that have been brought to light within the interpretative task (boxes 9 and 10).

This final hermeneutical stage of appropriation for Ricoeur is an individual and critical one of sifting and judging between variations in order to take them back from the imaginative world of play into every-day reality. Devising drama necessitates that the task is also communal and creative. Thereby, text is refigured as a drama, and the world-of-the-‘reader’/devisers will be influenced and transformed. The performed drama is a work of appropriation of the text as an act of interpretation.

It is impossible to know in what ways the passage from Luke was appropriated within the men’s everyday lives, though there are clues of intent carried within both dramas. *Jesus the Teacher* called for faithful listening to Jesus’ teaching. *Pharisees and*

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<sup>66</sup> Ricoeur (his emphasis), ‘What is a Text?’, p. 124.

<sup>67</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Explanation and Understanding’, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> Ricoeur (his emphasis), ‘Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation’, p. 144.

*Tax-collectors* began with a depiction of separated, self-seeking humanity and ended with the joy of a shared meal with Jesus from which a group withdrew, portraying a concern for inclusivity within the kingdom of God. This was endorsed within discussion. *Darash Thatha Ojulu* spoke of the passage showing the equality of God's love for all, while *Girma Obang Olok* commented on the impact of that equality of love on the formation of Christian character in the concomitant beckoning-call to the unity of fellowship, 'The drama [has] different characters, and Jesus came to teach about the character. Tax-collectors, Pharisees - Jesus came to join [unite] the characters.' These men live and participate in a world of volatile ethnic rivalry. The Anglican Church, in common with all the other churches in this region is not unaffected by these tensions, while their Christianity beckons them to long for and work towards alternative peaceable and inclusive ways of life.<sup>69</sup>

For Ricoeur this appropriating stage of re-figuration and trans-formation is the end purpose of 'reading'. However, it remains in dynamic relationship with understanding, and so also with explanation, for each continues to feed the others. One can always go back and forth between the stages, though it is not possible to return to a former state of pre-figuration or of naïve understanding.

Within the fieldwork project a subsequent phase of the spiralling arc took place in practical terms, for on the Friday morning the men as one group devised drama for the complete passage (Luke 7: 18-35) that they had previously dramatized within two sections. This caused them to re-assess their focus of the drama, as *Michael Anyar Garang*

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<sup>69</sup> Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: the Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), pp. xi-xii.

explained: ‘The message is about John’s ministry and Jesus’ ministry. This, what we realised the focal point.’ In the subsequent drama they dropped their opening explanatory scene of the tax-collectors cheating the Pharisees, as *Michael* continued to reflect: ‘So we see the point of the Pharisees and tax-collectors it is there in the passage. But it is not really the focus.’ Through the collaborative process, the experimental work of the first two day’s dramas moved towards the settled form of what they considered to be the major focus of the extended passage. In contrast to Martinez’ commentary that focused on the narrational development within the passage through its depiction of the Pharisees and tax-collectors, the men chose to abandon their focus on these characters of the verses of Luke’s interspersed commentary (verses 29-30) in favour of a clear depiction of John the Baptist’s disciples toing and froing between him and Jesus to show John’s ministry being superseded by Jesus’ ministry. From my point of view as a spectator, they lost the clarity of their characterization of the Pharisees and tax-collectors. Yet, the process of devising, with its two enacted ‘inferential walks’ (Eco) enabled both viewpoints to have a material hearing, sighting and experience. For ordinary orally focused ‘readers’, just as for critical scholars, any engagement with Scripture beyond an initial approach of first naivety places the ‘reader’ into this triple dialogue, that can be re-engaged with at any time: between the world-of-the-‘text’ and its explanation, its application within the world-of-the-‘reader’, and the imaginative engagement that lies between the two worlds within the world of possibilities unfolded in-front-of-the-‘text’.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Through Ricoeur, Pavis and Eco’s structural frameworks I have offered a functional account of the hermeneutical process, with little inclusion of the affective and effective nature of what takes place within it. Though devisers (and watchers) of biblical drama have

moved through the stages of the interpretative process they may still not have the words with which to explain cognitive ‘meaning’, for within the drama meaning is expressed through the doing (and seeing) of the embodied narrative, and its effect and affect is not necessarily expressed conceptually.

In devising their drama the men had focused on the world-of-the-text, but this was necessarily undertaken within and with reference to their own world of experience. Interpretation is essential, for the configuration within the text only reaches completion in the ‘reader’. Though the signified meaning of a text lies within the world-of-the-text itself, its reference is to a reality that lies beyond itself ‘opening before it a horizon of possible experience’, ‘a proposed world that I might inhabit and wherein I might project my ownmost possibilities’.<sup>70</sup> The interpretative task is one of unfolding what is mimetically within the text, enabling the horizon of the world-of-the-text to meet the horizon of experience of the ‘reader’. As the text opens up an imaginative world of possibilities that intersect with the reality of the ‘reader’, the horizons act upon one another enabling re-configurations of the ‘reader’s’ reality through a Gadamerian fusion of horizons.<sup>71</sup> As an interpretative wager, the hermeneutical task is never complete, for the work of explanation, understanding and appropriation in dynamic relationship, continues as long as, and to the extent of engagement with the telling.

Through collaborative and creative discussion and activity the men had worked to reach an interpretation that had explored the text and remained true to what they found

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<sup>70</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation’, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, p. 26. Ricoeur notes this contribution of Gadamer as a ‘very fruitful idea’, in ‘The Task of Hermeneutics’, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 43-62 (p. 62).

within it and to what they perceived as its intent as they made interpretative and dramaturgical decisions to form its embodied re-presentation. Though my own interest was focused on the activity of devising, the men were always most interested in what their drama could offer an audience, as *Darash* explained:

Because those people that are coming to watch the drama they don't know this [...] To make this clear for them [we] need to show all the activities and the history. We can keep with the story so that they understand through the drama: the activities, they mean this. They don't understand before. We need to make very clear for them so that they understand.

This concern for an audience (as for their congregations within their Bible-studies) led to their call for clarity, so demanding the close attention to the text-itself that Ricoeur sought through 'explanation'. Such explanation, however, has to be in conjunction with the drawing of a world-of-possibility through the understanding that is built upon imaginative dialogue with the explanation, and that reaches concrete form within their dramatization. Through this concern for clarity and understanding by an audience, the devisers themselves engaged in an open configurative task of interpretation of dialogue between the text and their own world. As *Wilson* commented, 'The people are doing the drama they're teaching people. They are teaching themselves also. They are teaching themselves and aware-ing themselves.'

The process of devising biblical drama is a holistic, collaborative and creative activity of configuration, while the performed drama itself is the configurative decisions of the process in an embodied and practical re-figured form. Process and performance

enabled the men's interpretation that had followed a Ricoeurian pathway of intertwining explanation and understanding. Through this chapter I have demonstrated that devising drama may be understood through the framework of a Ricoeurian hermeneutical process. Yet, this is only a partial explanation of what takes place through the re-telling as drama, and the next part of the investigation is to more closely analyse the nature of devising drama itself.

## Chapter Seven

### 'Something seem to be Different ...'

#### Enacting Scripture's Proposed Worlds through Devised Drama

Something seem to be different when you put this thing [Scripture] into drama. [...]

When we put them into drama they become easy to understand. When we show it in action it will remind people that all these things do happen.

(*John Gach Dak*)<sup>1</sup>

Having explored, through a Ricoeurian hermeneutical framework, the processes at work when biblical drama is devised, this chapter investigates what is added through the particular form of the engagement through drama. *John* describes this as: 'something seem to be different'. He suggests that when Scripture is experienced through drama, understanding is enabled through remembering in a manner that is distinctive to drama. Interpretation through devised drama is not simply another way of approaching Bible-study, but adds its own particularities to the making of meaning. As I have shown in previous chapters, engaging with Scripture may favour either the critical linearity of literacy or the more circuitous approaches of orality.<sup>2</sup> Drama offers its 'something different' through its third approach: mimetic embodiment and enactment.

My analysis of the nature of devised biblical drama builds upon what has been seen within the men's dramas as discussed in the last two chapters, particularly that of *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors* (Luke 7: 24-35). Drawing out what this medium of

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<sup>1</sup> Morning Prayer Drama, Thursday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter four.



interpretation has offered, I develop four areas of its distinctive nature. The first characteristic is the nature of the process of devising itself, seen within the collaborative and creative practical activity that built the embodied interpretations within the specificity of the men's own context. Secondly, I explore drama's specific form as embodied and mimetic enactment where Scripture is interpreted within a symbolic materiality of 'let's pretend'. Thirdly, through this mimetic juxtaposition of actuality and actualized, the effectivity and affectivity of the experience of drama can be seen as having a liminal quality. Finally, in parallel with the concern of the church leaders to 'keep with the story so that they understand through the drama', as voiced here by *Darash Thatha Ojulu*, its character is also one of playfulness and fun. The conversation that forms the theoretical investigation of the chapter places drama, theatre and performance theory in dialogue with the church leaders from Gambella, as well as with their dramas, while continuing to develop my foundation of a Ricoeurian hermeneutical theory of the dynamic of memory and beckoning call being carried within a mimetic telling.

### **7.1 The Process of Devising: Collaborative Creativity in Context**

The process of devising biblical drama, as illustrated by the church leaders of Gambella within their Morning Prayer dramas, can be characterized by its collaborative and creative nature that makes an end product of a refigured passage of Scripture. Each drama developed through a process, whereby the give and take of conversation *about* the text moved toward a conversational enactment *of* the text within discussion, and led to the event of the embodied and performed drama of the refigured text, created out of what is held within the scriptural text in juxtaposition with their own selves within their context. The essence of devising drama is carried within Joan Schirle's loose, but succinct definition of devised drama as 'making it up ourselves' by adding to her definition, the

inferred contextuality of 'here-and-now'.<sup>3</sup> The 'it' refers to the created embodied product of the drama, but Schirle's focus is firmly centred on the dynamic relationship between the collaborative enactors and the creative process, as I had discovered within my youthful experience of devising drama, and that is now at the centre of my present concern.

Firstly, as a 'making' that is undertaken by 'ourselves' as a group, the collaborative process of devising encourages the diversity and sharing of gifts present within any group of people, making it particularly suitable for an ordinary church group to engage in the interpretative process.<sup>4</sup> Though within my illustrations of drama all the church leaders can read and each had their own Bible, as long as someone within the group can read, the illiteracy that is predominant within these church leaders' parishes becomes no barrier to this practical method of scriptural engagement, as demonstrated by Kanyoro's group of women in rural Kenya.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, other gifts such as imaginative creativity, expressive orality, or physicality may be all the more strongly developed. A diversity of gifts is necessary for a process that leads to the creation of a product that carries its scriptural interpretation through its embodied re-presentation, rather than through the verbal assertion of meaning, such as within a sermon or the Gambella Bible-studies. The key to the devising of biblical drama is for a group to carry the necessary skills between them and to be willing to share them, engaging collaboratively and holistically in the whole interpretative process of making-sense. The process offers an analogy of Paul's

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<sup>3</sup> Joan Schirle, 'Potholes in the Road to Devising', *Theatre Topics*, 15.1 (2005), 91-102 (p. 93). This issue is devoted to the topic of devised drama, the opening 'Montage' providing a number of definitions, pp. vi-vii. See also, Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Helen Nicholson, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 39.

metaphorical picture of the body of Christ within which Christians use their gifts and efforts co-operatively and without hierarchical distinction within the life of the Church. The collaborative activity of devising biblical drama intrinsically forms its practitioners according to Paul's precept.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, in accord with and also beyond Ricoeur's insistence on the productive and creative nature of interpretation, both the process and the product of drama develop and emerge from the holistically creative nature of the experimental and exploratory work of a group.<sup>7</sup> The sum of the total will be more than its constituent parts as ideas, creativity and energy are sparked from one individual to another.<sup>8</sup> They may begin with a cerebral playing with ideas, and indeed the men often began the process sitting around a table, with their Bibles opened, engaged in deep conversation. Yet, devising drama may not remain in the cognitive sphere, for all drama is inherently practical, only reaching expression through a showing of embodied, physical action that is both process and product. Watching the men, there often seemed to emerge a point in the conversational process where energy levels rose, and first one and then another would move into embodied enaction within the conversation. In support of my concern for scriptural engagement within orally focused communities, Virginie Magnat celebrates the fact that devising drama 'defies [...] privileging of discursive reason over embodied knowledge'.<sup>9</sup> *Luk Galla Ochalla* commented on the mode of expression: 'Telling history, you are just speaking by your

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<sup>6</sup> I Corinthians 12:4-5, 12ff. Nicholson proposes the educational as well as democratic nature of applied drama, *Applied Drama*, p. 38. See also Oddey, *Devising Theatre*, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 20-33 (p. 21).

<sup>8</sup> Schirle, 'Potholes in the Road to Devising', p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Virginie Magnat, 'Devising Utopia, or Asking for the Moon', *Theatre Topics*, 15.1 (2005), 73-86 (p. 74).

mind, by what you know. But to make it as a drama you may need to show it to the people'. Showing dramatically demands embodiment. The embodied use of the multiple views and voices within the group calls for a holistic engagement of everyone involved to share their imaginative creativity, for the activity of 'making it up' carries no blueprints of other dramas to copy, unless there is a prior tradition of drama for the specific passage being dramatized. Though devised biblical drama uses a textual passage from Scripture as its stimulus, in devising there is no set format for how it is to be translated into mimetic, physical activity. Indeed, *Pharisees and Tax-collectors* was a very different drama to its companion piece, *Jesus the Teacher*, just as on the previous day *Jesus the Healer* and *The Prison* had provided such dissimilar depictions of the one biblical passage. What the individuals of the group, in co-operation with each other bring to this holistic task of making sense of Scripture through the making of the embodied form of drama is what will define its result.

Finally, devised biblical drama forms an enacted re-telling that is 'our' interpretation that has been made by 'us together' within this specific place and time that is 'our own'.<sup>10</sup> Making a drama in response to a passage of Scripture is intrinsically contextual as well as interpretative. In *Pharisees and Tax-collectors* everyone had a shared knowledge of the type of bureaucracy illustrated by the tax-collectors, just as on the previous day *The Prison* had depicted a recognisable scene. The contextual nature of *The Prison* had made it not inappropriate for the anachronistic Bible (a book, and including the New Testament) to be taken to the first century prison. The performed product, as with any interpretation, uses and expresses in material terms 'this' particular group of people's

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<sup>10</sup> Ferdinand Lewis, 'Rumination: Why Devise? Why Now?' *Theatre Topics*, 15.1 (2005), 23-24 (p. 23).

holistic worlds of individual and shared experience and knowledge, both conscious and subconscious, imagined and actual, secular and spiritual, with their norms and values and their hopes and fears, for there is nothing else from which they can develop and build their communal interpretation of the biblical narrative.<sup>11</sup>

Produced by, within, and for the particularity of their here-and-now, collaboration, creativity and context necessarily forms part of the particular identity of both the embodied process and its resultant embodied enacted product of devised biblical drama. The fruit of the devising process is seen within the final product, though this must not be viewed as the total outcome, for the interpretative process and its resultant interpretation will have evinced more than is enfolded within the drama. Indeed, Schirle reminds her readers that there can be 'no guarantee that the best ideas' will be those that 'emerge' from the cooperative process.<sup>12</sup> Yet, she also writes that, 'among the joys of devising are discoveries made during the dramaturgical work', adding that 'even when the finished product is less than one hopes for, the overall experience may be transformative'.<sup>13</sup> It is for this reason that my description of the drama of *Jesus the Teacher* as not developed beyond naïve understanding must be made with caution, for I was not party to the discussions that formed the drama. Yet, the activity and product of a drama remain a consequence of nothing other than the activity of the particular process applied to the scriptural stimulus, taking place at a particular time, by a particular group of people, within their own particular context.

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholson insists (using Victor Turner's terminology) that applied drama is 'always contaminated by context', *Applied Drama*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Schirle, 'Potholes in Road to Devising', p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

## 7.2 The Nature of Drama: Mimetic Enactment Displayed

The form of the product resulting from the creative and collaborative process of devising is the mimetic form of a drama. Ricoeur reminds us that humanity makes sense of life through a mimetic process which, while bearing close relationship with metaphor, uses a narrational telling of the relationship between character and action through its emplotment.<sup>14</sup> Patrice Pavis describes theatrical performance as a 'narrative using signs', a telling through its own language of doing and showing.<sup>15</sup> The tax-collectors and Pharisees of Luke 7 were re-presented in our midst by four of our group, and we watched them, through a developing story, respond to each other, and to John the Baptist, and to Jesus. Devised biblical drama changes the representational and presentational mode through which the mimetic and configured narrative is displayed from the textual 'telling' format of Scripture to that of the showing of enacted embodiment that is done and seen as well as heard.

Most of the participants in my fieldwork discussed drama in terms of showing a picture, which *John* expanded as 'shown action'. A passage from Scripture may be read, told, or remembered and imagined and so needs no material existence, but as soon as it is enacted, it has a material being that is brought, out of the post-textual realm of the mind within thought and imagination, into physical activity that is shown within the here-and-now of the present context. Happening within and using the things of its own specific

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 164-181 (p. 179); 'Life in Quest of Narrative', pp. 21-22.

<sup>15</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film*, trans. by David Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 23; see also, Nicholson, *Applied Drama*, p. 63.

context, they represent the things and happenings within Scripture so that devised biblical drama has no choice but to bring the world-of-the-text to meet and relate with the world-of-these-particular-deviser/actors through the nature of its form.

In drama imagined activity is told through created actual activity, in a relationship that is described by the influential performance scholar, Richard Schechner, as 'actuals'.<sup>16</sup> People, objects, actions, space and time represent and make present other people using other objects in other places and times forming a referential there-and-then that is actualized in that it is shown as if it is physically taking place here-and-now. The ambiguity of this double nature as the actualization of a tangible symbol in contrast to a merely symbolic example led to an explanation by *John*:

When we make an example that we throw a stone into a river. By showing that we throw a stone into the river [he raised his arm as if throwing], so people may not fully put it in their mind. But if we throw a stone and then it will jump into the river and the water will make a noise, so something will come exactly as what we made by making a symbol, but it is something tangible, tangible and show the real picture of the river. It was a history, but when we put it in the drama it become a picture, a helpful one.

The material and happening nature of drama's physicality separates it from other mimetic art forms such as literature and painting, for within drama two forms of physical existence, one an actual reality and the other an imagined but actualized representational reality are

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Schechner, 'Actuals', in *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 26-65.

held within the same entity as 'two independent but reciprocating realities' that are known and accepted by both performer and audience.<sup>17</sup>

The theatrical scholar, Bernard Beckerman describes this double life of the imagined acts of mimetic drama within the relationship of an act-scheme and act-image. The act-scheme is the actuality of what is done forming the presentation of symbols that suggest 'another dimension of existence', the act-image.<sup>18</sup> In *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*, an act-scheme can be seen within the activity of the five men. Two pairs of men: *Girma Obang Olok* with *Paul Puok Chol* each carrying a haversack slung over his shoulder, and *John Gach Dak* with *Darash Thatha Ojulu* came from different sections of the room. Listening, they walked slowly across the room towards *Michael Anyar Garang* who was standing alone, but projecting his voice so that everyone in the room could hear what he had to say about John the Baptist. For the five men, as well as for those watching, these men were fellow ordained leaders of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia. This forms one half of the double or split nature of the action. In addition to this, through the 'let's pretend' nature of their activity, within the act-image opened up by the act-scheme, they were the tax-collectors and Pharisees watching, listening and moving towards Jesus. The haversacks were a symbol of what they were-not, as the means of carrying food that would have been used in first century Galilee. As a symbol the bags were imitative in that they were a means of carrying food, but it was also constructive in that it had interpreted the means of carrying in contemporary and available terms.

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<sup>17</sup> Schechner, 'Actuals', p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, ed. by Gloria Brim Beckerman and William Coco (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 28-42, 101-109 (p. 31).



Bert States writes of theatre as a 'language whose words consist to an unusual degree of things that *are* what they seem to be. In theater, image and object, pretense and pretender, sign-vehicle and content, draw unusually close.'<sup>19</sup> My fieldwork participants would have agreed with States, for many made comments similar to *Luk Galla Ochalla's* proposal that 'we show them the *exactly* things what has been done at that time'. However, though the men had a plate in one of their haversacks, they carried no food, for this remained of a purely imaginary nature. Beckerman is cautious, insisting that 'while the act-scheme can approach the appearance of the act-image, it does so only in relative terms'.<sup>20</sup> As Ricoeur argues within his use of the term mimesis, the actual is never the referential reality, but a 'creative imitation' as a representation of it.<sup>21</sup> Showing 'exactly' has to incorporate the use of imagination and the use of understood symbolic convention.

Beckerman demonstrates that cultural dramatic convention offers conceptual rather than imitative mimetic relationship with its referential image.<sup>22</sup> This can be seen in Gambella's costuming of Jesus, for as *John* explained, 'a white robe, they will know it is Jesus'.<sup>23</sup> Here, they follow in a performance tradition that extends to films, and most of the church leaders of Gambella had seen at least Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*. Within this usage, costume is less a naturalistic representation than it is a coded message for

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<sup>19</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 20

<sup>20</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Function', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 274-296 (p. 292).

<sup>22</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, pp. 104, 107.

<sup>23</sup> The men discussed the import of costuming the devil who 'will make himself not like a human'. They asserted differing methods as suitable for the 'villages', 'there is traditional wear, animal skin or leaves of the trees', and for 'the town' (Gambella), where their costume was made from grain sacks, taking several hours to make, following a method that had been used before: 'If we see a person wearing that one, it is not a person. It is a devil.'

informing both actors and audience of something of the nature of this key character. In Scripture, white robes indicate purity, for to be washed by God is to be made white and so purified.<sup>24</sup> The divine 'Ancient One' of Daniel has clothing 'white as snow' and Jesus' garments at the Transfiguration 'become dazzling white such as no one on earth could bleach them'.<sup>25</sup> Beyond mere convention, whiteness is symbolic and carries a theological message, portraying Jesus' sinless humanity that also carries the glory of divinity.

Whether through imitative parallel, as in their use of a real plate, or through convention as in their use of Jesus' costume, or through shared imagination as with their 'food', the dramatic form enables an actual activity in the midst of the physical reality of the here-and-now to tell of an imagined activity of a there-and-then. Through a narrative plot, a mimetic actuality is given through its physical presence in the here-and-now that can be understood by others. This use of one thing or activity as another is described by Beckerman as act-schemes which work in a physical and sensory way to represent and lead to act-images that are perceived through the senses, and in dialogue with semiotic codes, that speak to the imagination and understanding of both those who act and those who watch. To this Beckerman adds another layer of representation, for act-images themselves represent an 'inner life' of the drama of 'what the imagined act reflects'.<sup>26</sup> Returning to my illustration of the drama of *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors, Paul, Girma, Darash and John* walking slowly across the room towards *Michael* represent tax-collectors and Pharisees

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<sup>24</sup> Psalm 5:17; Revelation 7:13.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel 7:9; Mark 9:3 (and parallels).

<sup>26</sup> Beckerman, *Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979), p. 19. For an illustration of this model's use in biblical performance criticism, see William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), pp.61-65.

Seven: 'Something seem to be Different'

moving toward Jesus, which in turn represents an inner-life within the drama of the charismatic and drawing nature of Jesus' ministry.

Together, act-scheme, act-image, and act-inner-life form one segment of the whole narrative telling of the drama built up from a whole chain of action to form its total act-scheme. Thus, Beckerman presents a nesting, and so progressively encountered scheme of deepening mimetic possibility through an engagement that is better described as a Ricoeurian world-in-front-of-the-drama rather than as something that points 'exactly' to the world-behind-the-drama of the scriptural text. I suggest that this can be taken one stage further to accord more fully with a Ricoeurian account of hermeneutics that leads from the sensed and imagined world-of-the-text/drama towards the beckoning possibilities of a world-in-front-of-the-text/drama with its call toward transformed ways of being. This, I have designated as an Act-possibility, and within my illustration this can be seen in its offer of a possible world beckoning to all who act, listen and watch to respond to Jesus' universal call. An act-scheme provides the artistic surface of the drama, but devised dramas depicting Scripture are never intended as pure spectacle, rather through their engagement with the senses they seek to draw both actor and any audience into its semiotic world, and so to its world-of-possibility and meaning. I show the relationships between the layers in the diagram below.

<b>Act-Scheme</b>	→	<b>Act-Image</b>	→	<b>Act-Inner-Life</b>	→	<b>Act-Possibility</b>
What the actor does	→	Presents what the character does	→	Revealing the world-of- the-drama	→	Offering of possible worlds-in-front-of-the-drama
<i>Darash, John, Girma &amp; Paul walk towards Michael</i>	→	Pharisees and tax-collectors walk towards Jesus	→	Jesus is a charismatic teacher who draws people	→	A world where Jesus calls to all who listen and seek him
Sensed	→	Sensed and Imagined			→	Imagined and Lived
<b>World-of-the-Drama</b>			→	<b>World-in-Front-of-the-Drama</b>		

Figure 7.1 The nesting mimetic representational process of drama

The deepening layers of engagement within the drama are and remain in a dynamic relationship that affects the whole person within the indivisibility of body, mind and spirit. The actual presentation of an act-scheme imitates an act-image that offers an act-inner-life which leads to imagined worlds of possibility beyond the bounds of the drama which may in their turn lead to fresh ways of actual living within the kingdom of God. By designating this additional layer of the world-in-front-of-the-drama as 'act-possibility' the terms hold their relational nature within the terminology and accord with Ricoeur's hermeneutical insight as well as Beckerman's model.

In this view, in re-presenting narratives from a foundational text, devised biblical drama offers possibilities drawing to the future, while remaining distanced from its origin

in the same way, as Ricoeur asserts that texts are distanced from their authors.<sup>27</sup> As discussed in chapter five, Scripture, though revelatory offers itself and not the fullness of the original event that lies behind it, and devised biblical drama in its turn no longer carries its whole founding text from Scripture, except as it is held in the memories of its actors and spectators. *Pharisees and Tax-collectors*, despite *Luk*'s insistence that 'we show them the exactly things what has now been done at that time' is actually more itself than it is Luke 7: 24-35. Instead, it offers its own possibilities and imposes its own limitations. Schechner comments that though the original impulse for a work will form its kernel, the creative process of 'twisting and transformation' causes the work to 'break off and become itself [...] mak[ing] its own demands in accord with its indwelling form or action' which 'may be stubbornly unlike those of the original impulse or conscious plan'.<sup>28</sup> This can be seen in the drama of *The Prison* where the developed focus on their setting detracted from the Christological conversations with Jesus of 'Are you the one?' that form the scriptural focus.

As an interpretative activity, Ricoeur calls for interpreters to follow the text's lead, to 'place oneself *en route* towards the orient of the text'.<sup>29</sup> The confessional nature of devised biblical drama means that its devisers will be particularly concerned to faithfully follow the route that is mapped out by the passage of Scripture being enacted in order for

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 131-144 (pp. 140-142). Robert Morgan would be more cautious, proposing that 'the natural instinct is to ask what the speaker or writer [or deviser of drama] intended', in *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 270.

<sup>28</sup> Schechner, 'Actuals', p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding', *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 145-164 (p. 162).

the text-itself to have a living and transformational presence within their community. This perception can be seen as leading to the interpretative decision in the subsequent drama based on this passage (Friday) where John the Baptist was removed from prison. *John* spoke of such collaborative discernment.

When we think, when we design, when we sit to design how we put the reading, the text into a drama, so we come up with many ideas. That is why you always see us, we are talking a lot. This is how we design. Somebody can come with his mind: 'Design in that way.' And some people they correct it. [...] That is *why we need to design the way that look exactly like it was meant*.

While *Luk* had spoken of drama showing 'exactly things' *John* had qualified this to a desire that the drama may 'look exactly like it was meant'. He has reflected on the creative and different nature of what is shown between act-scheme and act-image, as in his illustration of the throwing of a stone into a river. He seems aware that despite such concern to follow the route of the text, drama remains an interpreted mimetic imaginative enactment made through a collaborative dialogue between these particular people through their particular means within their particular context, and is not the text-itself. For *John*, as I suggest would be the case for others making confessional interpretation through devised drama, the crucial matter is that the meaning of the drama remains in accord with what is perceived as the meaning of the founding authoritative text, even when that meaning is explored and expressed through the somatic experience of drama rather than in more conceptual terms.

The double nature of imagined acts is replicated in the actors of drama themselves, for they are 'producers and product', both creating and performing the imagined acts, yet also, as characters, being part of the imagined activity.<sup>30</sup> *Michael* described the ambiguity in terms of a picture that is both made and seen, 'When we make the picture we will bring it again. We ourselves will come and see it again'. As makers of 'the picture' the devisers have had to use the world of their own consciousness, experience, and imagination, working in relationship with the world-of-the-text to decide how they will display the world of their 'imagined acts'. Within the dramatic conventions of their context they develop behaviour for their act-scheme, from their own experience and imaginations, to form what they consider will best denote the act-image they wish to convey, for they have nothing else with which to respond to the intimations of the scriptural text. Schechner describes performance as 'twice-behaved' or 'restored behaviour'.<sup>31</sup> In *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*, *Darash* and *John* as Pharisees use the language of speech, gesture and action that is developed from what they have used and experienced from others, for this is the way that they know or imagine that self-pride and deprecation of others is expressed and communicated. *Darash* and *John* both formed and performed the Pharisees who sat back with disgust when offered imaginary food by *Paul* and *Girma* as the tax-collectors, but in the imaginative world-of-the-drama they also were the Pharisees treating the tax-collectors with contempt and refusing their offer of food. Schechner writes of the ambiguity of acting, for (using Schechner's terminology) while one of the Pharisees is not-*John* who is actualizing the drama, the Pharisee is also *John* in that he is not-not-*John*, for he has been

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<sup>30</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Schechner, 'Restoration of Behaviour', in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), pp. 35-116 (pp. 35-36).

formed by *John*.<sup>32</sup> Thus, a complex relationship forms between the two who are one within the spatial and temporal frame. The actor forms the activity of the not-me, but there may also be a sense in which the not-me, through experience and reflection, may begin to form the-me that is playing the not-me. Through his exaggerated portrayal of the contempt of the Pharisee, *John* both provided humour, but also distanced himself from the behaviour of the Pharisee, for the exaggeration allowed him to be less-Pharisee and more *John*-playing-at-being-a-Pharisee.<sup>33</sup>

Schechner writes of the transformations and transportations of performance, suggesting that though the actor is only transported throughout the 'as-if' or 'let's pretend' time of the drama, these transportations of Ricoeurian imaginative 'inhabitation' may also lead toward actual transformation.<sup>34</sup> For an actor, playing a role 'as-if' it was 'me' leads to an embodied engagement with the content of the drama and to a juxtaposition of the as-if-me with the actual-me that lies beneath the framed enactment. While *Girma* and *Paul* as tax-collectors both formed and performed their offer of imaginary food to the Pharisees, they also actually experienced the reality as well as the imagined-reality of both cheating the Pharisees and of trying to share food with them. Their actual experience of the contempt and refusal of the Pharisees was in contrast with their actual experience of Jesus' affirmation and fellowship. *Michael* described the ambiguity of the actor's role for both actor and audience, using the example of playing Mary in the Christmas drama:

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<sup>32</sup> Schechner, 'Restoration of Behaviour', p. 112.

<sup>33</sup> This can be seen as an instance of the distancing of Brechtian 'alienation', *Verfremdungseffekt*, for instance see Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp. 146, 180-182.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Schechner, 'Performers and Audience: Transported and Transformed', in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), pp. 117-150 (p. 125). Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102).



Actors, they are representing. They are in the presence of those who are taking their place, like when you are Mary and you will have the same message. The message of [for] Mary, it is in the person who come to you [Gabriel]. So you are a picture, and those who are watching, instead of looking at the holy Mary, they are just watching you. You are the holy Mary. You are the full message.

Through enaction, the world-in-front-of-the-text has become the world-of-the-drama, offering its own world-in-front-of-the-drama. The act-scheme, act-image and act-inner-life all work in experiential and reflexive relationship with each other offering their worlds of wider possibility for the community of the Church seeking transformation and formation of the lives of its members living in increasing accord with the kingdom of God. Responding to Scripture forms part of its formational pathways, and so despite the fact that devised drama will necessarily carry its own interpretative self, rather than the full presence of Scripture itself, it may yet be a vehicle for formational discipleship through the worlds of act-possibility offered by the depth of playful engagement within the not-me and not-not-me nature of acting.

### **7.3 The Effect of Drama: its Liminal Quality**

Drama takes place in a chosen specific space that is set aside from everyday life, even if only temporarily, while yet being held within it as somewhere within which the activity may be performed and shown. The space and time of the surrounding actuality act as a framing mechanism that separates and highlights the dramatic time and space within from all that is outside the frame, for as Beckerman states, without such separation between

actuality and 'imaginative existence', drama would be 'merely life'.<sup>35</sup> Though, in the drama of *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*, Michael spoke to a room consisting primarily of his fellow church leaders, everyone in the room knew that they were in a framed dramatic space and time, where the point of what was taking place was its referential imaginative existence of Jesus talking to the crowds. The framing holds both performers and spectators together as a community focused on the activity taking place within the symbolic time and space of the drama, while the task of the actors is to lead themselves and their spectators on a journey through the imaginative existence within this narrative time and space so that, using *Wilson Okello Akuay's* words, 'things we remember we brought it now into the present'. Separated, yet in juxtaposition the world-of-the-drama and the everyday reality of the world-of-the-actor/audience are held up against each other so that each passes comment upon the other as a physical presence as well as within the imagination. Yet, *Wilson's* comment suggests he may have in mind something further than mutual commentary, for he suggests that the world-of-the-drama is brought, 'now into the present'. Walter Benjamin's depiction of 'messianic time' where past and future converge in the moment of 'the time of now' accords with *Wilson's* notion of bringing the past into the present to offer its anticipatory Ricoeurian possibilities within *this* present moment.<sup>36</sup>

It is the flux of this split and separated time and space which, holding their memory and beckoning call within the 'time of now', offer the liminal possibilities within which the double-natured activity may take place. As a threshold, the liminal has been described by

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<sup>35</sup> Beckerman, *Dynamics of Drama*, p. 10. Schechner defines performance as 'any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed', *Performance Studies*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 253-264 (p. 263).

Victor Turner as 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial'.<sup>37</sup> Consequently the liminal is outside the norms of the everyday, enabling it to become a temporary place and time of ambiguity and indeterminism where anything might happen, so allowing the Ricoeurian possibilities held within the text of Scripture to become embodied by and within the midst of the people engaged in the process.<sup>38</sup>

Mimesis has a representational symbolic nature which Ricoeur demonstrates offers a productive and creative more rather than a weakened trace of reality.<sup>39</sup> The nature of drama as something 'more than representation' enables the liminal possibilities, so that the remembered of a there-and-then may be performatively 're-membered' in the here-and-now. As a space/time that is Turner's 'betwixt and between' that is neither quite here-and-now nor quite there-and-then, the remembered past and anticipated future bleeds into the here-and-now to become a physical presence, that is not its own referential past within its context, but offers its own remembrance, with its possibilities of effect upon the present so that it might offer its beckoning-call forward into the future.

In a similar vein, Terry Giles and William Doan write of the 'twice-remembered songs' of the Old Testament as an 'opportunity to make the song "sing" with the rhythms and flavours of who we are', and I would add, in the light of an act-possibility and

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<sup>37</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 102

<sup>39</sup> Ricoeur, 'Metaphor', p. 180.

'messianic time', of who we are beckoned to be and become.<sup>40</sup> The drama of the *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors* brought something of Luke 7: 24-35 into an embodied, 'alive' material form within the present that can be seen as 'singing' 'with the rhythms and flavours' of the men who devised and performed it. This can be seen culturally within the shared plate for a shared meal within the second and third scenes. Yet, and far more importantly, this may also be seen within the drama's depiction of the past, present and future beckoning-call of Jesus (and John the Baptist) to respond to the 'justice of God' and 'God's purpose' (verse 29) that is at the physical centre of the passage. This formed the focus of the men's drama, and culminated in the now-and-not-yet of the conclusion of the drama in the fellowship of the meal with Jesus, from which the Pharisees absented themselves.

As a juxtaposition of there-and-then with here-and-now, that is neither quite one nor the other, what takes place within the liminal space/time is made present and acts as its own perception and critical judgement of the reality that is beyond the threshold of the mimetic framing of the drama. In 'making present' within an embodied form something happens performatively. Jill Dolan writes of the 'performative utopias' of theatre that enable alternative worlds to be glimpsed and fleetingly experienced from within the present, in a way that makes 'palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better':

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience [and, I want to add, of the actors] in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world

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<sup>40</sup> Terry Giles and William J. Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), p. 5.

might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. As a performative, performance itself becomes a “doing” in linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin’s sense of the term, something that in its enunciation *acts* – that is, performs an action as tangible and effective as saying “I do” in a wedding ceremony.<sup>41</sup>

Dolan uses Austin’s work on performativity against his own view of theatre, where Austin insists its mimetic nature renders it ‘hollow or void’, because he insists the performativity of such ‘play’ is not serious.<sup>42</sup> Austin writes from outside a Ricoeurian view of the nature of symbol as offering more rather than less in its opening up of potential. Ricoeur writes of ‘poetic text’, but extends his view of text to cover all ‘telling’. Dolan demonstrates the relevance of Ricoeur’s perception (as well as Austin’s) within the mimetic and liminal world of drama. Dolan writes of ‘utopian performatives’ as within a hope of an alternative and better world, where, and she quotes Ricoeur, ‘the field of the possible is now opened beyond that of the actual, a field for alternative ways of living’.<sup>43</sup> As aspects of the process of cultural and social imagination, as already introduced (chapter five), the utopian has a draw toward alternative, subverting perception, while the ideological has a draw toward the integrative, and to legitimizing the *status quo*. Yet, Ricoeur insists that each can be either ‘wholesome’ or ‘pathological’ (or diseased), so leading towards or away from the health and wholeness of humanity (as a whole), so

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<sup>41</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Dolan, p. 95; Paul Ricoeur, ‘Ideology and Utopia’, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp308-324 (p. 320).

calling for a hermeneutics of suspicion as well as of listening.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, he also asserts the import of a utopian imagination, for 'from this "no-place," an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted', enabling us to 'radically rethink' what-is.<sup>45</sup>

Scripture, though at the foundation of Christian cultural memory, can be seen as utopian in that it calls humanity to re-think its anthropocentric version of reality in terms of an alternative theocentric one with its eschatological vision that it insists is a more true perception of reality. Despite Dolan's use of language that is redolent with scriptural imagery, and her admission that the 'spiritual aspects' of utopian performatives call her 'to something ineffable and strangely full of solace', she is careful to contain her utopian performatives within a primarily humanistic sense:

While I readily underline the spiritual aspects of utopian performatives, I'll emphasize, again, that I fervently wish for theater to claim its place as a vital part of the public sphere. [...] Theater can be a secular temple of social and spiritual union not with a mystified, mythologized higher power, but with the more prosaic, earthbound, yearning ethical subjects who are citizens of the world community, who need places to connect with one another and with the fragile, necessary wish for a better future.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ricoeur, 'Ideology and Utopia', p. 308.

<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur, 'Ideology and Utopia', p. 320.

<sup>46</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, pp. 135, 137.

Dolan is fearful of a fundamentalist use of 'messianism' that, in Rami Shapiro's words claims to 'cleanse the world from that which the messianists fear most: the messiness of human life [...] Humility is the antidote to messianism. Messianism knows what is right. Humility does not.'<sup>47</sup> In contrast, Dolan seeks utopian performatives that are 'grounded in the humble, messy attempt to seek out human connectedness' and writes of a performance that offered a perception of Messiah 'as a poetic figure of hope and redemption, rather than a site of surety, rightness, ontology, or coercion toward a fixed ideal'.<sup>48</sup>

Shapiro's perception of 'Messiah' is in direct contrast to the primary scriptural perception of Messiah that is fulfilled within Jesus' life, death and resurrection with its anticipation and beckoning call to human fulfilment with and within God. The Incarnation affirms the messiness of creation, for God himself came to live within it, while at the same time inviting humanity to a participative and imaginative, transformed perception of living life in a new way. Ricoeur writes of the parables of the kingdom as stories about the 'extraordinary within the ordinary' proposing a "burst" or an "exploded" universe', that offer through their limit-expressions the experience of inhabiting the proposed worlds of limit-experiences of the kingdom of God that is less a fixed prescription than that it draws as a directional hope.<sup>49</sup>

The possibilities of mimesis offer drama as a liminal performative space/time in which to embody such limit-experiences. Ricoeur's perception of the mimetic nature of

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<sup>47</sup> Rami Shapiro, 'Meet the Messiah; Kill the Messiah', *Tikkun* (November-December 2004), 34-35, quoted by Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 136.

<sup>48</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Manifestation and Proclamation', in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer, ed. by Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 48-67 (pp. 60-61).

'poetic text' suggests that its revelatory nature invites its 'readers' into the world-in-front-of-the-text so that they might enjoy an opening-up of possibilities within their own lives. Such texts could be described as also operating within a liminal space in that 'readers' are invited to enter in-between places from which they can engage in fresh relationship with their own reality. As a particular form of the general nature of poetic texts, Scripture invites its readers into the revelation of its liminal world. What is different about devised biblical drama is that the world-of-the-text of Scripture is given a material form. Dolan insists that it is the 'very present tenseness' of drama that offers the possibility of imagining and experiencing utopia, 'not as some idea of future perfection that might never arrive, but as brief [and ephemeral] enactments of the possibilities of a process that starts now, in this moment'.<sup>50</sup> As the tax-collectors leant forward to join in fellowship with Jesus over their meal, *Girma* and *Paul*, and those who watched them were in some present sense invited to see and experience the inaugurated, but not yet realized, eschatological *communitas* of the kingdom of God within the midst of the ordinariness and mess of their daily lives.<sup>51</sup>

The actual and the imagined activity under the one unified form of a drama happen in the midst of actors playing their characters who are present in the actuality of here-and-now. *Peter Kuel Lul* saw drama as offering an opportunity to 'live' within the possible world-of-the-drama: 'To show drama is very good for us. We gain something. It is not because we are just playing. We live it. [...] We have experience.' The characters and activity are both here and yet not-here. Martin Heidegger writes almost sacramentally of the power of a work of art to create the presence of its reference, 'it is a work that lets the

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<sup>50</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 136.



god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself'.<sup>52</sup> *Peter* had spoken similarly from the point of view of the actor's participation. *Michael* and *Girma* saw the same relationship between representation and actuality in terms of the picture that they made for others: 'When we make the picture we really bring them to life again' (*Michael*); 'The people go and watch they will understand he [Jesus] is real. When we did this drama, they will go back and think, "Oh, this is real"' (*Girma*). Though the mimetic activity refers most directly to its own world-of-the-drama, in representing the scriptural text here-and-now, something of the text's reference is brought into the present that enables Scripture to not only be found but experienced directly through the inhabitation of its proposed worlds as they have been offered within the event of the drama. Yet, continuing to follow Ricoeur, and offering a more cautious approach than Heidegger and the fieldwork participants, this is no longer exactly the reference lying behind the drama or the scriptural text, for as an interpretation the drama now holds its own fresh presence within this particular here-and-now that is then carried forward into the future. As an ephemeral event that is lived 'now', unlike the relatively 'fixed' nature of the scriptural text, the presence of the drama is carried forward within its interpretative memory and anticipation. Yet, and following Ricoeur and Rowan Williams, the drama and its remembrance may also be revelatory through the ephemeral world of the drama.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Heidegger, quoted by States, *Great Reckoning*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 104; Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 131-147, p. 147.

#### 7.4 The Serious-Playful-Fun of Drama: Efficacy and Entertainment Entwined<sup>54</sup>

Benjamin writes of Jewish remembrance that 'stripped the future of its magic' by making each present moment of remembrance to be the 'time of now' beckoning to the future, for 'every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter'.<sup>55</sup> *Peter* speaks of 'not just playing', but of living the drama, while Dolan writes of the utopian possibility as a performative 'now': 'Let me feel for a moment in my body and soul what the world might be like.'<sup>56</sup> Such serious perception of the affective and effective nature of the 'something different' of drama seems somewhat at odds with the strong characteristic of biblical drama in Gambella to involve comic fun. Their Morning Prayer dramas were full of fun and the joy of laughter at such serious topics as the brutality of prison life, disability, extortion and bullying, and a deliberate turning away from table-fellowship with Jesus. Within a dramatization of the Passion, performed in a focus-group session, the sleeping disciples were kicked awake by Jesus at Gethsemane. It was performed and enjoyed as a comic touch within a more solemn drama, as shown in the photographs on the following page. The desire for laughter seemed intrinsic to the very act of playing that is drama. This characteristic of the devised biblical drama of Gambella to be fun, evoke laughter and to entertain is a function that does not normally form a necessary part of biblical interpretation.

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Schechner, 'From Ritual to Theater and Back: the Efficacy-Entertainment Braid', in *Performance Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 112-169.

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin, 'Theses on Philosophy of History', p. 264.

<sup>56</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 141.

Seven: 'Something seem to be Different'



Figure 7.2 Gethsemane: A serious drama interspersed with a sense of fun<sup>57</sup>



This process of intermingling fun and seriousness was described by *Michael* as play: 'We just take the passage [...] and we can play, we play.' His use of the word 'play'

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<sup>57</sup> Focus group (Friday).

implies creative flexibility, and an engagement that is fun, and in Gambella I encountered an overwhelmingly positive and relaxed attitude to the making of drama in which participants were both deeply engaged and full of fun as they set about the 'serious' task of scriptural interpretation. Johan Huizinga writes of such 'fun', 'intensity' and 'absorption' as of the 'essence of play', but also (and in line with Austin's view of performatives), that is "not serious" because of 'standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life'.<sup>58</sup> Schechner correctly demonstrates the problem with this insistence that play intrinsically has no function, because it is 'not serious', by discussing play's biological and social functions which both derive from life and are rehearsals for life.<sup>59</sup>

Schechner defines play as an 'improvisational imposition of order', that accords with Ricoeur's insistence on narrative telling producing order and sense from the disorder of the 'heterogeneous elements' of life.<sup>60</sup> The ordering of time and space within the 'play frame' indicates that what is taking place is symbolic activity that is 'only play', but is nevertheless always 'serious', for otherwise play will become 'sloppy and dull, not fun', and consequently, I would add that it will cease to have value as play.<sup>61</sup> Ricoeur, working with Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory (itself developed from Huizinga), writes of the symbolic nature of play as somewhere 'we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning which holds sway over the reader'.<sup>62</sup> The play of devised drama is in this absorbing,

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<sup>58</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, 1st pub. 1938 (London: Temple Smith, 1970), pp. 13, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Schechner, 'Drama, Script, Theater, and Performance', in *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 66-111 (pp. 100-107).

<sup>60</sup> Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Schechner, 'Drama, Script, Theater, Performance', pp. 104, 107.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge:

serious-but-fun dynamic 'space of meaning' between the devisers and Scripture, where all elements are involved and 'in play', and where all may be transformed, not only at the time of play as the devisers become characters within their drama and the passage from Scripture becomes the drama itself. The interpretative play also means that none of the players return to the place from which they began, though the transformation can only be to the level of their engagement within the play.<sup>63</sup>

Against the long ambivalence of the Church toward drama the medieval *Corpus Christi* plays seamlessly wove fun and pious seriousness together, as seen in twenty-first century form within the fieldwork's dramatization of Gethsemane.<sup>64</sup> The Wakefield *Second Shepherds Pageant*, in close juxtaposition with the dramatization of the shepherd's visit to the stable, offers an analogous depiction of a lamb in a cradle through its farcical story of Mak hiding a stolen lamb.<sup>65</sup> The fifteenth century play of *Dives et Pauper* offers its justification for fun, for Pauper insists on such activities as virtuous as long as they lead, not to pride, lechery, gluttony or sloth but 'for devotion, honesty and *mirth*, to teach men to love God the more'. Pauper quotes Psalm 118: 24 in defence of such play on the Sabbath:

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Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 182-193, p. 187; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), p. 102.

<sup>63</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 21; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 102; Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', p. 186.

<sup>64</sup> For ecclesiastical critics of theatre, see Max Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p. x; Joshua Edelman cites Jeremy Collier's attack on the Restoration theatre, *A Short View of the Immorality and Prophaneness of the English Stage* (1698), in 'Can an Act be True? The Possibilities of the Dramatic Metaphor for Theology within a Post-Stanislovskian Theatre' (pp. 51-72), p. 52; and in the same volume, Trevor Hart, 'Introduction: Art, Performance and the Practice of the Christian Faith', pp. 1-9 (p. 3), *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> A. C. Cawley, ed., 'The Towneley Cycle: The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Pageant', in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, Everyman edn (London: Dent, 1993), pp. 75-104.

'This is the day that God made/ *Make we now merry* and be we glad.'<sup>66</sup> In practice, this seems in accord with the drama of Gambella, and not necessarily for any purpose beyond that of enjoyment. Yet, their laughter at the brutal and the demeaning suggests it serves a wider purpose.

Mikhail Bakhtin's work on carnival argues for the value and subversive nature of the festival fun of 'the people' that 'celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and form of the established order'.<sup>67</sup> 'Carnival laughter', he proposes is fundamentally subversive, drawing people together to laugh at everything and anything, and so offering a freedom from being bound by the norms of everyday authorities and fears: 'The people play with terror and laugh at it.'<sup>68</sup> Through laughter the world is seen from a new perspective, offering a temporary victory and a forward looking hope: 'Through this victory laughter clarified man's consciousness and gave him a new outlook on life. This truth was ephemeral; it was followed by the fears and oppressions of everyday life, but from these brief moments another unofficial truth emerged.'<sup>69</sup> Bakhtin's view of laughter and carnival can be seen as functioning in a similar manner to Dolan's utopian performatives. Both spring from a liminality of a time that stands outside itself for a brief spell, so enabling a freedom that is outside the norm. The world that is laughed at is the world of fallen humanity that prefers to see it as absurd and natural rather than tragic - and not as immutable. Its very absurdity enables fresh perspectives, and so an opening of new possibilities.

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<sup>66</sup> *Dives et Pauper* (my emphases), quoted by Max Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation*, p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

This view of the importance of play and laughter receives theological consideration within Jürgen Moltmann's theology of joy, which he perceives as a present means by which we anticipate in hope our eschatological future in order to find freedom within the uncertainties of the present, for 'in playing we can anticipate our liberation and with laughing rid ourselves of the bonds which alienate us from real life'.<sup>70</sup> He proposes that play enables humanity to engage critically in the past and present of what appears to be a situation of an 'immutable' status quo, so showing that life need be so, for, in accord with Bakhtin, he considers that 'we discover with a laugh that things need not be as they are and as we are told that they have to be'.<sup>71</sup>

Schechner insists that efficacy and entertainment are necessarily entwined, for as already quoted, 'when seriousness is taken away from play, then playing grows sloppy and dull, not fun'.<sup>72</sup> For the church leaders of Gambella the desire that drama would be 'attractive' as well as 'effective' was repeated many times, offering an equivalent of Schechner's entertainment/efficacy braid. *Darash* remarked: 'They [the audience] will come because they like drama.' To be 'attractive' drama must draw attention to itself, bringing and holding its audience within its power and forming them into one community.<sup>73</sup> Unless a performance is attractive it cannot entertain and an audience will not give it its full attention, and so the sense of community will fragment. Unless attention is given to the performance, it cannot have effect upon its audience according to its own

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<sup>70</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, trans. by Reinhard Ulrich (London: SCM, 1973), p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Schechner, 'Drama, Script, Theater, Performance', p. 107. See also Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Schechner, 'From Ritual to Theater and Back', p. 156.

perceived purpose.<sup>74</sup> *Darash* had asked, while devising *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors*, 'What is the message for these people? What change do we want to make in the spirit?' In the perception of the church leaders, biblical drama was not made simply for the sake of presenting the narrative, but rather that it might have performative affect and effect. Beckerman remarks that 'entertainment marks the attainment of that first level of engagement', without which the imagination cannot be involved that helps spectators 'take a leap beyond physical limitations into a realm of infinite possibilities'.<sup>75</sup> Bakhtin, Moltmann, the medieval *Corpus Christi* plays, and the fun of the Gambella dramas are all in accord, but may suggest, against Beckerman, that such 'entertainment' is more than simply a 'first level engagement', for it serves a wider purpose, not least in the light of the beckoning call of the hope of Christianity, for, Moltmann insists, 'we are then no longer playing with the past in order to escape it for a while, but we are increasingly playing with the future in order to get to know it [...]'.<sup>76</sup> *Pharisees and Tax-Collectors* not only remembered, but drew us toward the future fellowship of the eschatological banquet, so - 'make we now merry and be we now glad'.

## 7.5 Conclusion

'Something seem to be different when you put this thing into drama.' Through the theoretical work of this chapter I have suggested the centrality of the embodied nature of this 'something different' that is drama. As an act of devising, the embodiment of biblical drama offers an interpretative method that is collaborative, creative and contextualized, making it appropriate for any group within a church, rather than being most suited to

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<sup>74</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p. 48.

<sup>75</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, p. 36.



critical scholars. As a means of telling, drama's embodied and nesting act-scheme presents a mimetic act-image that offers a world-of-the-drama. The dynamic relationship of the two 'independent but reciprocating realities', of the actual contextual and the mimetic actualized, that are both carried within the world-of-the-devised-biblical-drama invite engagement with the drama's act-inner-life and act-possibility of the world-in-front-of-the-drama<sup>77</sup> This offers a liminal space in which Scripture may be given an interpreted, embodied and affective presence within the midst of a church community through ephemeral moments of participation within both Dolan's performative utopias and the fun of Bakhtin's effervescent carnival laughter.

*John* had said that 'when we show it in action [the drama] will remind people that all these things do happen'. His statement brings the remembering into the present. Those things of the past are also the things of the present, despite the messiness of our world. God has acted and he does act. These things did happen and they 'do happen'. By inhabiting drama's 'proposed world' we may be part of that anticipation of the future where these things also will happen, for God will continue to act.<sup>78</sup>

Within Ricoeurian terms, the interpretative process of devising biblical drama enables a refiguration to take place from what is prefigured within this community, through the configurative process to its re-told form as a drama. Through the interpretative work, drama offers its own particular qualities of engagement: the collaborative creativity of devising, that leads to the product of drama whose nature is of shown mimetic enactment, that offers a liminal 'betwixt and between' time of engagement with the world of

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<sup>77</sup> Schechner, 'Actuals', p. 43.

<sup>78</sup> Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of Revelation', p. 102.

possibility that is inhabited temporarily through the entwining fun and seriousness of the playful activity. Through dialogue with the reflections of the church leaders of Gambella and their Morning Prayer dramas as devised during the fieldwork, this section of the thesis has developed a Ricoeurian hermeneutic of devised biblical drama that offers the 'something seem to be different when you put this thing into drama' of proposed worlds that may be temporarily inhabited. This is a picture of aspirational possibility, though developed and rooted within the orally focused reality of Gambella. The final part of this work is yet more deeply rooted within its context as it turns to the present practice of devised biblical drama in Gambella where through repetition some dramas have become tradition, so accepting previous scriptural interpretation rather than making it anew. While continuing to investigate themes already introduced, this poses fresh questions to this study of what this means for the inhabitation of Scripture's proposed worlds within my concern for what the interpretative process of devised biblical drama and its role in Christian formation has to offer the individual and the local church community.

Seven: 'Something seem to be Different'

### **Part Three**

#### **Gambella: Developing a Tradition of Biblical Drama**



## Chapter Eight

### Showing and Telling the Christmas Drama: Iconic and Dialectic Performance

#### The Slaughter of the Innocents: A Comedy?

The remembering, they are show how Jesus is born, step by step by step. They are following the step. With the person who preached they don't know [...], people are just listening. But the *drama show people directly* how Jesus. Where they were yesterday, this is how people are. [...] *This mean remembering*. The people they are watching it, they remember it. *Remembering*. (Wilson Okello Akuay)<sup>1</sup>

Having begun to develop a hermeneutics of devised biblical drama, I turn to the present practice of biblical drama within the Anglican churches of Gambella, and within this chapter investigate the Christmas dramas, a long established tradition that forms the root of their practice of using drama in their churches. These dramas are distinctive in their comic portrayal of Herod and the Slaughter of the Innocents.<sup>2</sup> The chapter continues to develop a hermeneutic of devised biblical drama by investigating the way that drama does its telling by 'showing directly', as in *Wilson's* statement above, aided by theatre theorist Bernard Beckerman's portrayal of drama as a dynamic relationship of showing and telling, as iconic and dialectic modes of performance.<sup>3</sup> The chapter develops from reflections on the Christmas dramas by the fieldwork participants, and is followed by a descriptive account of these dramas that leads to a consideration of the paradox of the tragic text that is

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group, Thursday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 2:16-19.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, ed. by Gloria Brim Beckerman and William Coco (New York: Routledge, 1990), chapters 3-4 (pp. 43-72).

given comic form, so following on from the discussion of the last chapter on the playful fun of drama in Gambella. I introduce and use Beckerman's categories to discuss the primarily iconic nature of the Christmas drama and its dialectical elements in dialogue with Jan Assmann's lens of the cultural memory of tradition in order to begin to perceive the relationships between this drama that is deeply ensconced in tradition and the fresh interpretation of the devising that had formed the Morning Prayer dramas of the fieldwork.<sup>4</sup>

### 8.1 Reflections: The Performative Nature of the Christmas Dramas

*Wilson* (above), with *Michael* and *Peter* whose reflections follow below, individually and corporately offer their perceptions of what performing the Christmas drama might offer their congregations within its dialogue of memory and beckoning hope. For *Wilson*, the shown re-enactment of Jesus' birth brings what is of yesterday *directly* to today. In this emphasis *Wilson* seems not to think of drama as a mimetic means of interpretation that is inherently productive, rather he accepts the performativity of drama, considering it as a direct means for these memories to be brought effectively into the present. *Michael Anyar Garang* and *Peter Kuel Lul* offer reflections that focus less on the activity of remembering and more on the beckoning effect of that remembrance.

*Michael*: Those who are watching the drama, the picture, will *learn* through something that they *see with their eyes* and then they *take it into their heart*, and they would be *aware God's Lamb comes*. They will *know*. They will *understand* the coming that is the *saving of the world* through watch the drama.

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<sup>4</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', trans. by John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, 65, Cultural History / Cultural Studies (1995), 125-133.

*Peter*: Yes, those who are watching, many things will happen. So, now people are just *waiting* for the birth of Jesus Christ. *They are happy, they joy, they will have hope*, for they have just been *looking for* the Son of God. *The Son of God come to them, will take them to heaven*, because Jesus is alive for them; because Jesus come to them.

Through *seeing* the drama, *Michael* claims that people may become ‘*aware*’ and take what they see ‘into their hearts’. Through a Ricoeurian reflective process between the world-of-the-drama in relationship with the world-in-front-of-the-drama they will *know* and *understand* what this birth means in eschatological terms: ‘God’s lamb’ as ‘*the saving of the world*’. *Peter*’s response jumps straight to the eschatological relationship between now and that now-and-future hope. His congregation are in waiting, and through drama’s liminal performativity ‘*he come to them*’ and ‘*take them to heaven*’. Peter suggests an ephemeral experience of communion such as is described by Dolan as a ‘utopian performative’, and in Christian terms can perhaps better be described as a ‘sacramental’ moment of grace.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this moment, ‘Jesus is alive for them’, and ‘*they are happy, they joy*’ in the now-and-not-yet of anticipatory hope.

For all three speakers, the past has been brought into an affective and effective presence within the present, concurring with Walter Benjamin’s perception of the messianic ‘time of

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter seven, Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 5-6.



now' where all time converges within the present moment.<sup>6</sup> The performative and liminal quality of drama causes it to be a particularly apt means of making anticipatory memory present. The men all talk of the shown rather than told nature of drama in their discussion of what people will 'see'. This, for Beckerman is of the iconic rather than dialectic mode of drama.

## 8.2 The Christmas Dramas of Gambella

All the Anglican churches in Ethiopia perform Christmas dramas within their own neighbourhoods, forming part of wider programmes of Christmas festival planned in conjunction with the ethnically organised Councils of Churches within each locality.<sup>7</sup> Having not been present at a Christmas drama, I use evidence from a focus group session (Thursday) to supplement documentary evidence, firstly, of the Opo Christmas drama of 2009, performed in the comparative intimacy of the Anglican congregation. This is supplemented by photographs from Matar, 2010, and a brief account from Pinyidu, 2011. These dramas were performed at ecumenical gatherings of about a thousand people, so forming distanced spectacles within the near-darkness.<sup>8</sup> The descriptions and photographs indicate what was noticed and seen as relevant by the writers and photographers, none of whom was indigenous to the community or could speak the local language used in the drama.<sup>9</sup> All the dramas were performed in the 'middle of the night' (leading up to

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 253-264 (p. 263).

<sup>7</sup> The majority of Anglican churches in Ethiopia celebrate 'International Christmas', while Anuak Anglicans celebrate 'Ethiopian [Orthodox] Christmas' on January 6/7<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The Opo church is deeply rural. Matar is a large, recently established and growing Nuer community. Pinyidu is a large refugee camp with several Anglican churches.

<sup>9</sup> These accounts and photographs are used with permission. Opo drama: account by Andrew Proud, photographs by Janice Proud. Matar drama: photographs by Emma Proud. Pinyidu drama: account by Colin Hodgetts.

midnight), forming the culmination of the evening's activities of Christmas Eve, of singing, prayer, Scripture and talks, the drama marking the traditional *kairos* moment when the birth of Christ is remembered and celebrated.

The dramas form an important and widely-spread traditional means of celebrating Christmas, for all the church leaders spoke of participating in these dramas in all their previous Christian denominational contexts, both within Ethiopia and Sudan. They perceive it as made up of 'many, many dramas' (scenes), beginning with the Annunciation, and, as with Christmas dramas throughout the Christian world, freely merging Luke and Matthew's accounts of the nativity. Churches, and groups within churches are given responsibility for different scenes which they organise and prepare beforehand. The complete drama is put together in the immediacy of the performance without prior rehearsal, thus retaining something of an improvisational nature, though also demanding the stability of a known and well-remembered structure and act-scheme.

The Opo drama took place in the centre of their church compound in the middle of forested bush. Space for the evening Programme had been created within a circle of school desks, providing seating as well as marking out the acting area in the midst of the congregation. The area was barely lit.

The drama began when the Opo church leader, acting as Gabriel told the woman, acting as Mary that she would become the mother of God's son, thereby through the act-scheme the church leader announced the good news of the Incarnation to his congregation. The drama was produced as comedy rather than with awe and solemnity. The audience watched Joseph 'hit the bottle' on hearing the news of Mary's pregnancy. They heard the

birth pangs of Mary, who with her midwife was hidden from sight underneath a sheet draped across school desks. Proud writes, ‘Mary panted a high pitched “uh” at regular intervals for ten minutes or more as the children, pretending to be recalcitrant sheep, arrived, scattered, dodged and avoided the shepherds.’ In this way the hidden act-image of the birth took place in the midst of and overlaid by an act-image of ordinary activity that also kept the audience involved and amused.



Figure 8.1 Shepherds and Sheep at the Stable (Opo drama)

On visiting the make-shift ‘stable’ the shepherds processed behind a wooden cross. Later, the ‘kings’ visited the stable carrying a Bible. These symbols at the centre of their own faith community enhanced the double-image of the visitors. They are both the

shepherds and kings of the narrative, and also representative members of their own Christian community as ‘today’s’ witnesses of the Incarnation.

The traditional act-scheme of the birth of Jesus was described by *Michael*: ‘When the time is come there will be sound of a child. At the birth time there will be cry, people will know the child is born. The child is appointed with the mother. They will bring something: the sound of a child.’ He mimed poking a baby. According to all accounts the birth was hidden, and so the cry of the baby indicates that the birth has indeed taken place. Proclaiming what had taken place mimetically, the cry of the actual baby is taken up by an outburst of noisy and joyous audience participation: ‘The cock is crow, donkeys, all those sound made by people. And then people will know the child is born.’

At Pinyidu, the account suggests that the slaughter of the innocents followed swiftly upon the birth: ‘Cut to the massacre of the innocents, when larger boys with branches of the sort we are given to swat away flies, chase through the compound.’ Proud’s account of the Opo drama provides a detailed description of the comic depiction of the role of Herod and his ‘slaughter of the innocents’:

A very tall man with clothing stuffed up his T-shirt represented Herod, who strutted around, leering at us, pointing to us each in turn. Whoops of delight from everyone as he approached us and then left, to usher in the three kings, who hovered indecisively over the manger – but we never saw the baby. As all this was going on, everyone began to twist nervously to the dark forest, where we heard the shouts and songs of what we took to be drunken revellers getting closer. But this was simply the final scene building up and soon, the fat, strutting, shouting Herod and his

henchmen all burst into the clearing with huge branches in their hair, to act out the slaughter of the innocents. By this time, Mary, Joseph and the child had long gone – slipped away in the commotion of Herod’s arrival. The grand finale was Herod inexplicably collapsing (in a fit of rage?) and being bodily carried off stage by his soldiers to hoots of laughter from everyone there. It was now past 12 o’clock – Christmas Day. All went quiet; we prayed and set off for our beds.



Figure 8.2 Herod enters with his Camouflaged Henchmen (Opo drama)

Photographs from Matar show the same barely lit darkness with the interior of the stable hidden from view. Here, the stable was made out of a sheet held high, the holders’ bodies forming an enclosure. The sheep of Luke’s narrative and the soldiers implied by Matthew are seen at the same time, making it unclear whether the soldiers ranged the stage throughout the drama or whether their entry formed the point at which the photography began.



Figure 8.3 Soldiers and Sheep range around the Enclosure of the Stable (Matar)

The photographs testify to the effort and emphasis focused on Herod and his soldiers. A padded stomach indicates Herod as well-fed, and so rich and powerful, and also, as with the Opo drama, a comic approach to the story.



Figure 8.4 The Fat-stomached Herod views his Soldiers (Matar)

Through anachronisms the ‘soldiers’ related the textual story to traumatic experience of life now bringing the past into close conjunction with the present. Most of the young men had covered their heads by pulling up hoods or by knotting plastic carrier-bags at the four corners. They carried equipment slung around their bodies that included thermos flasks and large plastic containers. Some had branches tied around themselves as camouflage. Many carried sticks representing rifles. One of the soldiers made mobile phone calls, perhaps to Herod, or perhaps co-ordinating the soldiers’ activity.



Figure 8.5 Herod’s Militia: Equipment and Mobile Phone Calls (Matar)

The photographs suggest an act-scheme of a more elaborate and militarized attack than that portrayed within the Opo drama. The indication is less of a sudden arrival of a gang of thugs than of a melee of a militia already present and active within the area. In the first photographs the men range the stage separately and in small groups. Later ones portray one large group in which it is difficult to tell who are the soldiers and who are those being rounded up, but ‘guns’ are pointed from the edges of the circle toward the



centre, and photographs show a girl amongst the men. In the action of the drama on these stages that are the bare earth at the centre of the church compounds, the two worlds of there-and-then and of here-and-now are brought close together, for like Bethlehem these places are no strangers to midnight raids and threats of violence.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 8.6 The Slaughter of the Innocents (Matar)



<sup>10</sup> In a border raid (2016) by ‘heavily armed men from the Murle tribe in South Sudan’, more than 200 Nuer were killed, over 100 children kidnapped, and 2,000 cattle taken. Madeleine Davies, ‘Dr Anis urges prayer after border attack’, *Church Times*, 22 April 2016, p. 13.



Three aspects of the dramatization of the Slaughter of the Innocents in the Gambella dramas are particularly worthy of note. Firstly, these elaborate act-schemes of terrorisation as they are evidenced from the reports and the photographs were not mentioned by the church leaders within focus group discussions. What appears so worthy of note to both photographers and chroniclers from outside the community were either seen as of no particular interest by those from within the community, or were screened out of their accounts that focused on the moment of Jesus' birth. Secondly, and as the account of the Pinyidu drama so succinctly reports, 'There are no dead infants'. Finally, as made very clear within the description of the Opo drama, and forming the particular focus of my consideration here, the depiction of the raid of Herod and his henchmen was fundamentally comic.<sup>11</sup> This surprising and apparently unsuitable use of comedy to depict tragedy calls for closer investigation.

### 8.3 Tragic Text and Comic Drama

Neither of the Gospel textual accounts of the birth of Jesus is generally described as comic, or as including comic moments, though as already indicated, medieval drama added comedy, such as the sheep stealing Mak, in the midst of a Christmas drama.<sup>12</sup> Luke's narrative is one of awe and joy, as shepherds and angels praise God.<sup>13</sup> Matthew ends his

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<sup>11</sup> This dramatization of Herod and the Slaughter of the Innocents may be part of a wider-ranging tradition within East Africa, for in conversation Andrew Rogers describes a similar scene as the comic climax of the Christmas Drama at Marsabit District in Northern Kenya, where the cast ran away as Herod and his soldiers appeared.

<sup>12</sup> A. C. Cawley, ed., 'The Towneley Cycle: The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Pageant', in *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*, Everyman edn (London: Dent, 1993), pp. 75-104.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, R. Alan Culpepper, 'The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections', in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol.

narrative of the nativity with the aftermath of the visit of the wise men in ‘persecution, escape and return’ in order to build his typology of Moses.<sup>14</sup> Proud notes the textual escape that was implied but not seen within the drama, ‘Mary, Joseph and the child had long gone – slipped away in the commotion of Herod’s arrival’. Matthew’s story of the escape of the ‘holy family’ is sobered by its textual closure with those who did not escape, and in Rachel’s weeping for her children ‘because they are no more’. Through the retaliation of King Herod, Jesus’ birth leads directly to Rachel’s lament. Morna Hooker comments that ‘the massacre of the infants reminds us that even God’s plan of redemption cannot be achieved without suffering’.<sup>15</sup> Earthly power, within Christian perception, has a tendency to oppose God’s kingdom on earth, with concomitant suffering for those on the margins of society. Yet, in the drama there was no suffering to be seen, rather the subversive nature of the audience who chose to laugh in the face of tyrannical earthly power.<sup>16</sup> In similar mode to Hooker, John Proctor considers ‘this sombre story’ of ‘wrath and violence’ as a foreshadowing of Jesus’ Passion, displaying ‘the shadowy side of human power’ that ultimately cannot prevail against the love of God.<sup>17</sup> Within the textual Slaughter of the Innocents wrath and violence appear to still reign supreme awaiting the consummation of the Passion and Easter with its anticipation of eschatological hope, while within the drama wrath and violence are extinguished with Herod’s ‘inexplicable collapse’. The Christians of Gambella know what it is to be in the midst of wrath and violence. What

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9, ed. by Leander E. Keck, and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 1-490 (pp. 63-66).

<sup>14</sup> Most commentators write of Matthew’s development of a Moses typology. See, for instance, Morna D. Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys that Open the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1997), pp. 37-39.

<sup>15</sup> Hooker, *Beginnings*, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> John Proctor, *Matthew: The People’s Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2001), pp. 28-29.

is to be made of this Gambellan interpretation of textual tragedy that uses symbols of its own experienced conflict and trauma in its playful and comic drama?

Neither Matthew's text or indeed any portion of Scripture, or the Gambella dramas fit readily within the literary or dramatic generic confines of Aristotelian tragedy and comedy.<sup>18</sup> Yet, there remains an atmosphere of anguish at unconquered evil within Matthew's account that is not present within the exuberant and light-hearted nature of the Gambella dramas. Cheryl Exum describes the tragic vision within biblical narrative as the 'dimension that reveals the dark side of existence, that knows anguish and despair, and that acknowledges the precarious lot of humanity in a world that is bewildering and unaccommodating'.<sup>19</sup> In contrast she suggests comedy has a 'restorative and palliative capacity' that, she continues, 'gives voice to a fundamental trust in life; in spite of obstacles, human foibles, miscalculations, and mistakes, life goes on'. She quotes Richard Sewall's contrast between tragedy's 'terror of the irrational' with comedy that 'removes the terror' despite 'questions, doubts, ambiguities'.<sup>20</sup> Rather than actually removing terror, comedy can perhaps be better seen, more in accord with Mikhail Bakhtin's view of carnival, as playing with it by showing its absurdity, and so diminishing its power.<sup>21</sup> In the light of these perceptions, Matthew's account of the Slaughter of the Innocents has to be seen as a tragic text, while Gambella with its subversive approach to earthly political power and its lack of dead infants offers a comic and joyous drama.

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<sup>18</sup> Cheryl Exum does not 'force the biblical material into Aristotelian categories', which she rightly insists, 'are hardly applicable', *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For a brief account of Aristotelian comedy and tragedy, see *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy*, by Eric Weitz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Richard B. Sewall, *The Vision of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), quoted by Exum, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 91.

No more than the Gambella dramas can be seen as development from classical drama are they direct descendants of the miracle dramas of medieval Europe, and yet it is here that offers closer parallels. The Herods of medieval drama also strutted, roared and engaged with their audiences. In the *Coventry Corpus Christi* play of *The Magi*, Herod's fury at the disappearance of the magi leads to a speech including, 'I stamp! I stare! [...] I rant! I run!' The stage directions add physical instructions, 'Here Herod rages in the pageant [wagon] and in the street also.'<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Shakespeare's Hamlet pleads for more restrained acting in opposition to over-acting for, 'it out-herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.'<sup>23</sup> In medieval England, it seems that Herod was expected to act in much the same way as in modern Gambella, in direct relationship with his audience and drawn large as a representation of a tyrant that was more a comic display than a frightening one.

However, there is less similarity in the approach to the slaughtering itself. In the medieval cycles the action includes scenes of slaughter where representative mothers fight for their children's lives and lament their loss.<sup>24</sup> In Gambella, the account of the Opo drama suggests that no other members of the cast remained 'on stage' once Herod and the soldiers arrived, for they 'slipped away in the commotion of Herod's arrival'. Though photographs from Matar suggest that there may have been a rounding-up of a section of the audience, beyond the chaos there was no representation of actual slaughter.<sup>25</sup> The account

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<sup>22</sup> *The Coventry Magi*, quoted by W. B. Worthen, *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), p. 225.

<sup>23</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III. 2. 14 (London: Longman, 1970), p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> In the Wakefield cycle the mothers oppose the soldiers, while in the York plays their greater passivity is seen as foreshadowing Mary at the foot of the cross. 'Introduction: The Slaughter of the Innocents', in *York Mystery Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King (Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> This was confirmed by Andrew and Janice Proud.

from Pinyidu specifically reports: 'There are no dead infants'. The careful display through costume and equipment of night-raiders of their own context acting as Herod's soldiers stops short of a representational enactment of the tragic killing itself. This iconic display of power depicts no trauma. Perhaps it is this that allows the dramas to remain primarily in their comic mode, for had there been scenes of slaughter, the mood of the dramas would have been necessarily darkened.

#### 8.4 Iconic and Dialectic Drama

The phrase 'iconic display', signifying the mimetic action that edits out the tragic phase of the narrative, suggests Beckerman's notion of the differentiation between iconic and dialectic modes of presentation may help make sense of the Gambella dramas.<sup>26</sup> The iconic is the displayed and *shown*, while the dialectic is of the *telling* of narrational development. In temporal terms, both modes are means of telling that remember and beckon, but while the dialectic lets time pass, the iconic seeks to capture it, so becoming more bound by its spatial nature. Marvin Carlson writes that theatre 'oscillates between the fleeting present and the stillness of infinity'.<sup>27</sup> Beckerman portrays the iconic and dialectic as polarised modes of theatrical presentation, outlining three contrasting characteristics of nature, action and effect for each, as indicated in my diagram below.

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<sup>26</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, pp. 43-55; 56-72.

<sup>27</sup> Marvin Carlson, 'The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive', *Theatre Journal*, 55.1 (2003), 207-211 (p. 211).

<b>Mode of Performance</b>		
	<b>Iconic Showing</b> 'Stillness of Infinity'	<b>Dialectic Telling</b> 'Fleeting Present'
<b>Nature</b>	Being, spatial Fulfilment	Becoming, temporal Development
<b>Action</b>	Unfolding display Ritual enactment Monoglottic	Cause and effect Suspense of relational resistance Heteroglottic
<b>Effect</b>	Illumination	Catharsis

Figure 8.7 Beckerman's Contrast of Iconic and Dialectic Modes of Performance<sup>28</sup>

The nature of the iconic mode is of 'being', spatially focused and looking to a time of fulfilment, while that of the dialectic mode is of 'becoming', focused on a moving and developing journey through time. Iconic action speaks with a single voice through an unfolding display that may be seen as a ritual enactment of prescribed movements, while that of the dialectic is of a multi-voiced dynamic of relational resistance through the continuing uncertainty of rising and falling tensions, and of cause and effect. The iconic effect is one of illumination, of things falling into place, while the effect of a dialectic performance that reaches conclusion is of an Aristotelian release of catharsis. As illustration, Beckerman offers Memorial Day parades as iconic, where representatives of different sections of a local community process between crowds of spectating, cheering fellow citizens.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, he cites Ibsen's *Dolls House* as a dialectic play of resistant

<sup>28</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, p. 55; Carlson, 'Theatre Journal Auto Archive', p. 211.

<sup>29</sup> Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, pp. 43-45.

forces between Torvald and Nora that also sought to relate dynamically with resistant energies within its nineteenth century audiences.<sup>30</sup>

Though contrasting iconic and dialectic modes of performance, Beckerman also demonstrates their inter-relationship, described by Carlson as ‘oscillation’. I have already described performance of drama as a ‘framing’, which taking something from life puts it inside a frame so that it may be separated from ordinary reality. In so doing, what is framed is ‘shown’ and so made more vivid and of greater significance.<sup>31</sup> Both the iconic and the dialectic are forms of framing, each frame emphasising its own characteristics. Yet, the very act of framing is one of iconic display. As a shown presentation even the most dialectic drama will contain elements of the iconic. Yet, conversely, Beckerman correctly insists that iconic performance will always include the multiple voices of the dialectic mode of presentation that tells through narrative as well as showing through a laid out display.

Paul Ricoeur insists, that to gain depth of understanding, it is necessary to *explain* what lies within a ‘text’ in conjunction with an engagement of imagination that seeks to *understand* what is taking place. It is through isolating and *explaining* the contrasting modes of presentation within the scenes of the Slaughter of the Innocents in both the Opo and Matar dramas that I unfold what lies configured within these dramas, so gaining

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<sup>30</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays: The League of Youth, A Doll’s House, The Lady from the Sea*, trans. by Peter Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), cited by Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation*, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Shusterman, ‘Art as Dramatization’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 59:4 (2001), 363-372 (p. 369).

clearer insight and *understanding* of what is being communicated through their dramatized interpretations of the text.

### **8.5 The Slaughter of the Innocents as Iconic**

The nature of the iconic mode is of 'being', spatially focused and looking to a time of fulfilment. The Opo dramatization of the Slaughter of the Innocents holds two contrasting visual spectacles. The first is of a rampant Herod and his soldiers. The second picture is of fulfilment in the empty stage, for without Herod his soldiers are impotent and merely carry him away. Herod and his soldiers are no longer present as a visible power and what remains to be seen is the audience, for it is the church in this place that remains to witness to what they have seen, heard and experienced. Secondly, iconic action is an unfolding display that may be seen as a ritual enactment of prescribed movements. This drama is not one of surprises, Herod and his henchmen have come and they have been rendered impotent. The story as it is remembered and told was the same last year, and will be the same again next year. Both act-scheme and act-image remain largely fixed. Thirdly, the iconic effect is one of illumination, of things falling into place. The baby, who is also God, has been born and is a sign that God's power ultimately has the victory. The collapse of Herod and tyrannical human power is physically removed by Herod's own soldiers. This, the final scene of the Christmas drama, displays God as triumphant. The iconic model does not, first and foremost, work with suspense, for it knows what and who it is and celebrates that fact.

Terry Giles and William Doan's description of the iconic as a 'moment frozen in time that celebrates identity' can be readily applied to the iconic model seen within the



Gambella Christmas dramas.<sup>32</sup> They are less a source of information about the Christmas narrative with its aftermath within the slaughter of the innocents than they are a celebration of the place of this narrative and its meaning within the life of this community. The making of such group identity is at the centre of Jan Assmann's discussion of 'cultural memory', defined by him as 'a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation'.<sup>33</sup> I suggest that Christian tradition falls within this description, offering a lens through which I may view the iconic Christmas dramas.

Assmann outlines six characteristics of cultural memory.<sup>34</sup> Firstly, he writes of the '*concretion of identity*' that is the fixed point whose 'horizon does not change with the passing of time' and that gives a community its knowledge and awareness of its own identity around which it is united and particularized. Cultural memory offers its understandings of who and what we are and who and what we are not, and so also, our notions of who is a member and who is not.<sup>35</sup> The cultural memory held within the Christian tradition is the fixed point from which Christians gain their identity and is carried within the stabilized *cultural formation* of Scripture and Tradition. Yet, such stability has to work in relationship with the cultural memory of each ethnic group within its own context. The *capacity to reconstruct* is cultural memory's ability to retain its fixed nature within the 'potentiality of the archive' while also enabling it to reconstruct itself for its own context, within its 'mode of actuality'. The general potentiality of Scripture is given

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<sup>32</sup> Terry Giles and William J. Doan, *Twice Used Songs: Performance Criticism of the Songs of Ancient Israel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Assmann, 'Collective Memory', p. 126.

<sup>34</sup> I have italicized each characteristic. Assmann, pp. 130-132.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

contextual re-construction within the Christmas dramas as one *organizational* means whereby its formed memories are communicated and inhabited. Finally, the forms of cultural memory carry its structures of *obligation* within the ‘binding character’ of its values, that yet remains *reflexive* as it ‘draws’ on itself to explain, review, criticize, and renew itself. Through its cultural memory, Assmann insists that a society become ‘visible to itself and to others’, proposing that, ‘which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society’.<sup>36</sup> Drawing these together, the Christmas dramas of Gambella carry the story, not only of the gospel accounts, but also of the particular ways in which the cultural memory of Christian tradition and its theology is carried within these churches, as they are formed from their remembrance of the past with the beckoning call of their values.<sup>37</sup>

Enacting the Christmas narrative in Gambella, I propose makes sense of the whole sweep of history, for past, present and future are shown to be in God’s hands. The essential story that is held within the textual pages of the gospels, but also within the cultural memory of this very people is made present in the embodiment of the drama. The quotations from *Wilson*, *Michael* and *Peter* with which I opened this chapter indicate the import for the community of this shared memory that is described by *Michael* as the coming of ‘God’s Lamb’ that means ‘the saving of the world’. Together, the community watch and share the remembered story, and ‘will learn’ and ‘take it into their hearts’ in such a way that they both ‘know’ and ‘understand’ what this means for them. Through the drama the community is affirmed, celebrated and created as it holds and passes the

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<sup>36</sup> Assmann, ‘Collective Memory’, p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> See also, Giles and Doan, *Twice Used Songs*, p. 16.

tradition forward to the next generation who are nurtured in their turn to become active participants within the community. This was actively taking place within the Christmas dramas as children played their part as sheep, and the youth as Herod's henchmen.

The drama is staged in a place that is the centre of the church compound, symbolizing the centre of the community, and physically holding actors and audience together as one fellowship of Christians, relatives and neighbours. Yet, this central space is one of heightened activity and meaning in that it is set apart from the mundane activities of daily life. The drama in their midst, physically, dramatically and spiritually affirms that the past of 'our story', that is 'our' tradition as it is remembered, is brought into this heightened time and space within 'our' present, forming 'our' values, giving us our identity and our sense of belonging. This is a liminal experience of what Victor Turner describes as *communitas*, 'a blend of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship', and defined by Dolan as 'the moments in a theater event or a ritual in which audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way'.<sup>38</sup> Through the annual re-enactment community bonds are strengthened, and stretch beyond their own fellowship and community across time and space to link with churches across the world and across the generations, with all those who have celebrated, do celebrate and will celebrate the Incarnation on *this* very night. Through the re-enactment of the story, the birth of Christ has been brought into the here-and-now of this community within a liminal moment that transcends time and space, as described by *Peter*: 'The Son of God come to them, will take them to heaven.' Carlson's description is apt, of

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<sup>38</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New Brunswick: Aldine, 1997), p. 96; Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 11.

an ‘epiphany’ experienced within the ‘stillness of infinity’.<sup>39</sup> Through the drama the Incarnation takes place here-and-now, and heaven and earth are brought together, in reality as well as within the act-image.

*Michael*’s reflections specified two groups who would watch the drama. Firstly, there are those members from within the community whose identificatory bonds will be strengthened by participating in the drama, whether as audience or as actor: ‘Those who know already Jesus, they will renew their belief when they see the birth of Jesus in the drama’. Secondly, *Michael* specified those from outside or on the edges of the community: ‘Those who are new, this drama is new for them. They will start and learn about the coming of Messiah through the birth of Jesus.’ As well as reminding those at its heart, the story is also for those on the edge of the community, telling of who this church community is and of the Incarnation that is at the heart of their belief. Through inviting people beyond the church fellowship to join them for the Christmas drama, the Christian community displays its own porous edges and its missional intent to draw people in, so that they may transform what is seen as ‘their story’ into ‘my (and so ‘our’) story’.

The dramatization of the Slaughter of the Innocents is just one scene of these Christmas dramas, but one that appears from the report and photographs to be of significance to their telling. Herod and his henchmen are the only characters in costume. Their camouflage of branches and their flasks and water bottles suggest great care and attention to detail. If effort and energy are a sign of what is important in the drama, this section of the drama has thus been rendered crucial by its makers. What part does this

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<sup>39</sup> Carlson, ‘Theatre Journal Auto Archive’, p. 211.

scene play in the community's annual re-telling of its cultural memory? Raiders burst out of the bush, offering an act-scheme of a potential act-image, -inner-life, and -possibility of chaos, fear and trauma. Yet, Herod collapses amidst the jeers and laughter of the audience. The villain of the piece has been humbled before them. They know that he only has rags stuffed up his t-shirt and that his size is not real; he is a pretend 'big man' who can no longer scare. He is like the Herod of the medieval dramas, and also like the villain of an English pantomime, for true to these dramas' comedic form, right will triumph. The known and experienced world where 'might is right' has been turned upside-down. The raiders burst out of the bush but they do not prevail. Christ has been born, and as in the words of Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, '[God] has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts [imagination] of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly'.<sup>40</sup> Utopian performatives offer 'better' alternatives that subvert the *status quo*.<sup>41</sup> Within the drama, the world has been turned on its head and we celebrate with joy and laughter.

This is the Christmas feast of the 'word becoming flesh' (John 1:14). Past narrational tradition, present joy and eschatological hope meet in the festival of the Incarnation embodied within the imagined world of the drama. The midnight raiders still come, and Herod, the political bully still rants, but they no longer have the final word, for God has acted decisively and it is not the children, but Herod who collapses and is carried out. Audience participation of jeers and laughter cut the tyrannical down to size as they show whose side they are on. However, the world-beyond-the-drama remains one over which

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<sup>40</sup> Luke 2:51-52. The *Magnificat* is spoken or sung at Anglican Evening Prayer.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Ideology and Utopia', in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 308-324 (p. 318); Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 21.

they have little actual control. Unlike Boal's theatre, the drama seems less a 'rehearsal for the revolution' than a showing of the God-given revolution of the now-and-not-yet of the kingdom of God.<sup>42</sup> The world may look the same, but there is hope, for 'the kingdom of God has come near', but it is one that though it is now-and-not-yet appears to demand little of its participating actors or audience than to be joyous and have hope.<sup>43</sup> Yet, Dolan comments on the effective 'pleasure of a utopian performative', for 'even if it doesn't change the world, [it] certainly changes the people who feel it'.<sup>44</sup> Her assertion accords with Ricoeur's description of 'proposed worlds', which through our imaginative inhabitation of them enable us to 'extend our own possibilities', and in terms of cultural memory show us who we are, and whose 'side' we are on.<sup>45</sup> The drama provides an experienced vision of what the world will be in the fullness of time, so having its effect through drawing those who participate in the shared experience to appropriate the vision within their own lives, forming the values of Christians within the Church as they play their part in furthering the kingdom of heaven on earth.<sup>46</sup>

The two worlds of a then-and-there that is both past and future fulfilment and of the here-and-now are brought close together in the action of this drama. It takes place on a 'stage' that is purporting to be Bethlehem and in the centre of the Christian community. The actors are members of this Christian community who, for the past few weeks have been learning their lines and practising, and are now pretending to be inhabitants of the

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<sup>42</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 135.

<sup>43</sup> Mark 1:15.

<sup>44</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102).

<sup>46</sup> Dolan, pp. 5-6.

first century. The audience have watched and shared in the preparations. Now, together they experience the *communitas* of having the re-enactment of their founding story within their midst. It is a participation of fun and laughter, for this is a festival of joy. It is untinged by the sombreness of Matthew's text. Tragedy has no place in this celebration of the glory of the birth of the baby who is 'Emmanuel', 'God with us'.<sup>47</sup> By embodying the story, the actors and audience participate in it and make it their own. Though hidden from sight, the audience and actors have heard Mary's birth pangs. The story has come among them: 'The word [has] become flesh and live[s] among them'.<sup>48</sup> The iconic is celebratory and monoglotic, and the Gambella Christmas drama that ends in its non-Slaughter of the Innocents appears to be so as well. In its effervescent festival atmosphere it lacks the awe and wonder of Luke's account as well as the nuance of Matthew's sombre ending.

### 8.6 Signs of Dialectical Drama

I have demonstrated that the scene of the Slaughter of the Innocents within the Christmas drama works in the iconic mode of presentation. It is celebratory: affirming and creating the cultural memory of these Christian communities. But is this the whole story? Beckerman proposes that dramatic performance inherently is formed from the telling of the dialectical as well as the showing of the iconic. Are there signs of the telling of dialectical drama beneath its shown iconic surface that may offer additional voices and nuance to the iconic display?

The nature of the dialectic mode is of 'becoming', focused on a moving and developing narrational journey through time. Though reinforcing cultural memory and

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew 1:23.

<sup>48</sup> John 1:14.

remaining iconic in its nature, the drama is a developing narrative with a beginning, middle and end. However well-known the story may be, the actors as characters in action take the audience on a journey through the cause and effect of the plot with its hidden birth in the midst of the ordinary, the significance of which is displayed only within its climax as Herod falls and is carried away.

Secondly, dialectic action is of a dynamic of the relational resistance carried within its actantial structures of purposes and conflicts, offering the rising and falling tensions of cause and effect. For young children of the church community and for some visitors the story may be un-known. There may be suspense as to what will happen when Herod and his henchmen burst upon the scene, as even experienced by Proud who knew the textual narrative. There is a shown relational resistance between Herod's group and the group that enact the narrative taking place within the enclosure that has been made for the stable. This is made particularly clear in the Matar drama where sheep and soldiers, the pastoral and confrontational mixture within the world of the every-day both fill and use the same space beyond the enclosure where, through the Incarnation, heaven has come to earth. It is the earthly that is readily apparent, while the heavenly remains hidden from view, and yet, ideologically speaking, that holds the ultimate significance.

Thirdly, the effect of a dialectic performance that reaches resolution is of an Aristotelian release of catharsis. Though the story is always the same, there remains a sense of climax at the grand finale that is greeted as an annually repeated sense of joy and of relief. Once more Herod has been vanquished, and God is indeed triumphant. Repeated stories and dramas retain the impact of their rising and falling tensions, as illustrated by the



telling of liturgy, particularly within the annual re-telling through Holy Week to Easter Day with its double climax of Crucifixion and Resurrection. According to Beckerman's description, and despite its primarily iconic nature, the Christmas drama also works through a dialectic mode of presentation.

There are clear parallels between Beckerman's notion of iconic and dialectic modes of performance and Bakhtin's opposition of the literary modes of epic and novel.<sup>49</sup> For Bakhtin, the epic, like Beckerman's iconic is characterised as monoglottic, closed and determined, with an official view of the past that is valorised and sacred. In contrast, the novel, like Beckerman's dialectic is heteroglottic, underdetermined and open, with an unofficial view of the past that remains in contact with a present reality as an evolving world-in-the making. Bakhtin's dichotomy presents a view of epic as stylised, inferior and deadly in comparison to the free form of the superior novel, for he argues for the dialogical form, against the monoglottic.<sup>50</sup> Here, I do not want to enter into questions of Bakhtin's value judgements, but I do want to consider his idea of the dialogical, in relation to Beckerman's use of the dialectic.<sup>51</sup>

Dialectic suggests the resistance of a confrontational dynamic. In comparison, the dialogic suggests different voices in conversation, with a dynamic that is not necessarily resistant or oppositional, but is inherently relational, encouraging rather than forcing development and change, and more in keeping with my perception of this research as

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<sup>49</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-40.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 7, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Max Harris insists, against Bakhtin, that drama is an inherently dialogical form, *The Dialogical Theatre: Dramatizations of the Conquest of Mexico and the Question of the Other* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 10.

conversation. Extending Beckerman's concept of a dialectic mode of presentation to a dialogical one encourages listening for differing voices within the drama, whether or not they are in resistance against each other.

Though the scene of the Slaughter of the Innocents concludes the Christmas drama, it is embedded within a wider Christmas programme whose activities provide alternative voices to act dynamically with the voice of the drama. Herod collapses, and as he is carried from the stage, God's power is shown as triumphant. However, at Matar on the following morning, God's power was once more displayed as contested for the choir sang of Satan continuing to act as tempter: 'Even though we have the Good News, don't receive the Good News and go to sleep, because Satan is here.'<sup>52</sup>



Figure 8.8 'Don't receive the Good News and go to sleep, because Satan is here'<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Translation by Nuer fieldwork participants, in conversation, December 2011.

<sup>53</sup> Matar, Christmas morning, 2010. Photograph by Emma Proud.

Satan was enacted, and so present in an embodied form within the community gathered for worship, and was played in the same comic style as the Herod of the Opo drama. During the verses of the song Satan came to tempt and disrupt the choir and congregation, while the choir leader, representing the Christian community in this place, chased him away at each repetition of the song's chorus. God's power that was triumphant in the drama remains within the song as a contested field, and one that is known experientially as well as through the embodiment within the song. Here, unlike within the triumphalism of the Christmas drama, its participants are asked to respond by 'staying awake' to the ways of God rather than of Satan within their daily lives.

Though the traditional format of the Christmas drama may be closed, it retains several places of indeterminacy allowing differing voices to emerge, particularly through its improvisational form that uses direct audience participation. Improvisation enables alternative act-schemes that lead to varying act-images. Where in the Opo drama Joseph was shown to resort to alcohol at the news of Mary's pregnancy, in Pinyidu he took the far more apparently 'violent' approach of dragging Mary 'three times round the circle at high speed'. The account does not specify how the act-scheme was used to present this act-image, but both accounts intimate that these were played as comic scenes that were enjoyed by their audiences, the Pinyidu account referring to 'heightened audience reaction'. Both dramas have filled in a gap within Matthew's account of Joseph's immediate response to the news of Mary's pregnancy. Each representative act-image perhaps indicates characteristic cultural means of response to such problems, again bringing the drama into relationship with their own lives. As well as evoking laughter, their comic depiction highlights, sympathizes and gently disapproves of such behaviour, for

comedy is built upon our shared understanding of human absurdity and frailty.<sup>54</sup> Yet, though the distress of Joseph at the news of Mary allowed for variations of act-scheme, they are ones that speak to the comic nature of the performance more than to an in-depth exploration of Joseph's feelings. Such psychological depth is not part of the purpose of this drama that has been performed as the centre-piece of the community's Christmas celebrations, for its purpose remains iconic, reinforcing the cultural memory through displaying the glory of the Christmas message.

The audience at a Gambella Christmas drama, as at a medieval *Corpus Christi* performance of *The Magi* will know in general terms what is expected of them when they react to Herod's activity on stage. Yet, each performance of the drama will be unique within its defined limits, dependent upon what is said and done by both Herod and his audience in the dynamic of their relationship with each other within the performance in this place and at this time, allowing, as at an English pantomime, for contemporary contextual allusion. The pattern of action used by the young people acting as Herod's soldiers will differ from year to year, as also will their acted relationship with Herod and the audience. The structure of the drama is traditional and set, but each year a different combination of people will be working together as they improvise, rehearse and perform 'this year's' drama, allowing the possibility for contextualization, and for fresh voices and perceptions to emerge to form an evolving tradition.

The report of the Opo drama indicates that both actors and audience were enlivened by the character of Herod. Playing the character that is personified as the antithesis of

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<sup>54</sup> Weitz, *Cambridge Introduction to Comedy*, p. 12.

Christian virtue appeals to the shadow, hidden, and fought-against side of the Christian personality, allowing it a hearing. He is the iconic villain that an audience loves to hate, symbolizing earthly power in opposition to God's purposes over which the audience believe that God has ultimate victory. Through its comic format the audience is able to show opposition and courage in the face of such tyrannical power. However, watching children interacting with Satan in a drama of the *Temptation of Jesus* suggested that the relationship may be more ambivalent.<sup>55</sup> The children knew that they were at a drama and found the antics of the pretend-Satan funny, and yet they also related to the character being portrayed as one that was frightening and to be avoided. They seemed not quite certain of the boundaries between representation and reality. Herod may also be responded to with such internal dialogism. Aristotelian catharsis suggests that the imagined reality of drama provides a safe way for audiences to experience and deal with such disturbing emotions as fear.<sup>56</sup>

The spectacular nature of the care with which Herod's soldiers have been costumed and equipped suggests an iconic framing of physical power. They are Herod, the villain's henchmen as the aiders-and-abettors of his evil purposes and are played by the young men of the community. As with Herod, such parts permit play with behaviours that are discouraged within the normativity of the Church. Within a different context, such a display could be an iconic celebration of young men portraying their ability and readiness for night-raiding. Seeking the drama's dialogical characteristics allows for the potentiality of alternative readings of the soldiers' characters as a minor and shadowed voice within the major Christian voice of the drama. Traditional ethnic iconic display and traditional

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<sup>55</sup> Sunday Programme. Also see chapter eight.

<sup>56</sup> Worthen, *Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*, p. 21. Richard Schechner, 'Ethology and Theater', in *Performance Theory*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), pp. 235-289 (p. 236).

Christian iconic display clash in a dialogue of authoritative voices, the primary Christian one partially subverted by an alternative and older, resistant and unacknowledged voice. Yet, the dramatization by the young men also bears similarities to an Anuak dance recorded by the anthropologist, Godfrey Lienhardt, in which warriors armed with rifles stage a mock attack on the homestead of their headman at his installation.<sup>57</sup> This portrayal of strength that could be oppositional is in fact its reverse, as an anti-symbolic laying down of weapons before the new ruler, for these weapons are the not-weapons of make-believe - whether it is an Anuak headman or the Christian God.

The nature of the dialogic is of the heteroglossia of voices in dynamic relationship with each other. Each voice will call and each voice will have effect upon the performance itself and upon the performance as it is experienced differently by actors and audience, and indeed, differently by each individual who is there. As at liturgy, within the unifying communal experience, there is also the differentiated experience of the individual as a series of interpretations and voices that are taken away at the end of the performance to have subsequent effect.

Beckerman's model of performance argues that though iconic and dialectic modes are contrasting, each are inherently present as actors and audience, performance and context act in dynamic relationship with each other. The dramatized Slaughter of the Innocents is primarily an iconic presentation, but one that is made more complex by the dynamism of the voices that it essentially contains and displays. Any analysis of what is

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<sup>57</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt (1957), cited by Judith Lynne Hanna, 'African Dance and the Warrior Tradition', in *The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa*, ed. by Ali. A. Mazrui (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 111-133 (pp. 122-123).

taking place within and through the drama needs to take its many voiced nature into account. What am I to make of Gambella's interpretation of textual tragedy that uses symbols of its own experienced conflict and trauma in its playful and comic drama?

The iconic nature of the drama denotes a celebratory communal sharing of the perceived truth of the joy and wonder of the Incarnation as God's decisive action in the world that turns the ways and powers of the world on their head. This forms the major voice in accord with the Christianity that is being celebrated, despite the comic approach to the narrative. However, exploration of other voices displayed within the drama present shadowed and subversive relationship with the major voice, and ones that may even be unperceived by the participants themselves. Human nature is drawn to as well as repelled by the symbolic character of Herod and the corporate one of his henchmen. They are played with energy and enthusiasm and draw a matching response from their audience. It is a playful engagement with what may lie deep within the psyche of the individual and of the community, and drama offers a safe actualized rather than actual space in which to give the unacknowledged voice. Yet, multiple voices carry risks, risks of which particular voices are heard and followed.

Ultimately, the major voice of the iconic drama is the primary one. The scene of the Slaughter of the Innocents tends toward the more triumphalist and iconic than to a nuanced depiction of the fall of Herod, as one more earthly king within a progression of ever-changing political hegemony, which would have been a closer depiction of political reality as it is experienced in Gambella, and elsewhere. This is not a naturalistic depiction of the rise and fall of political oligarchs, for the Church has gathered around the story that is at

the foundation of their community. The tradition is brought out of the pages of a book, out of the past and becomes present in enacted form in the midst of their own context. It is ‘our tradition’, an interpretation of the text that makes sense for ‘us’ here-and-now and that gives ‘us’ ultimate eschatological hope. The drama offers the possibility, and in doing so creates pathways towards its fulfilment.

### **8.7 The Christmas Dramas of Gambella as the Cultural Memory of Tradition**

Beckerman’s model of iconic and dialectic modes of performance (the dialectic extended to carry the multiple voices of the dialogical) has helped to unfold how Christians in Gambella make sense of the biblical accounts of the birth of Christ through their drama. Assmann’s perception of cultural memory’s ‘concretion of memory’ and also its ‘capacity to reconstruct’ is affirmed. In Ricoeurian terms, this reconfiguration of the stories as drama has enabled these Christians to bring the world-of-the-text into conversation with their own world to make sense of this foundational story that is for-all-time, as they hear its memory of the past and its call towards the future for themselves within the present of their own here-and-now. Yet, at its heart this traditional Christmas drama remains an iconic tradition following the same pattern each year, leaving little room for fresh appraisal of the biblical text itself.

The Christmas drama has become a tradition in its own right, though purporting to present the biblical text faithfully, as indicated by *John*’s comment that ‘We need to go through the text [when] making a drama because also those who attend their Bible, they have to say, “Oh yes, they do it as it is in the Bible.” Yet, Ricoeurian and performance theories, as well as the reality of the Christmas dramas show that mimetic representation is



a productive and creative process where the imitation becomes itself rather than a duplicate or weakened trace of the original. There is thus a necessary tension between the tradition of the scriptural text that is relatively fixed and unchanging and the tradition of drama that through its mimetic interpretation has created something different that carries its own being. Though the church leaders shared a desire to represent biblical narratives faithfully, in its production, the Christmas narrative has become a comedy for a joyous festival full of laughter and fun that is not present in the biblical text. The men did not appear to see a gap between the two, for the drama has become their traditional ‘reading’ of the biblical narrative, making sense within the dynamic of their own situation, their ways of performance, and crucially for the specific occasion for which it is performed.

Forming a communal celebration of the Incarnation that is a central tenet of their faith the drama gathers the community so that it physically surrounds and is part of the embodiment of their foundational story. Yet, Ricoeur rightly has concern as to whether any vision within such showing and telling is one that emancipates or that enslaves.<sup>58</sup> He argues that ‘the genuine function of ideology [is] the power to provide us with an *image* of what we are, [while the] originary function of utopia [is] the power of *otherness*’.<sup>59</sup> The cultural memory at Christianity’s heart calls toward social integration within the ideology of the tradition of the Church that beckons toward its eschatological vision of utopia within the kingdom of God that subverts the ways of the kingdoms of the earth. Unless the drama carries present hope and a call towards a liberative future within its remembering of its

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics’, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 89-101 (p. 101).

<sup>59</sup> Paul Ricoeur argues that ‘Faith may be described as ideology [and utopia]’, in ‘Ideology, Utopia, Faith’, in *The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture*, 17 (Berkeley: The Graduate Theological Union and the University of California, 1976) 21-28 (pp. 26, 28).

foundational past it can only be the 'false consciousness' and representation of an iconic memory of past glory.<sup>60</sup>

The Christmas drama carries the joyful nature of the Incarnation through its festivity, for the mood is one of ebullience rather than solemnity. Yet, the drama's comic emphasis on Herod and the attack of the soldiers on Bethlehem seems a deflection from the birth of the baby that is the focus of the Incarnation. This in itself can also be seen as a feature of Matthew's text in that his account of Jesus' birth is brought to its conclusion in the tragic slaughter of the innocents, for it is only the traditional English church nativity drama that culminates in worship at the stable. Through their comic depiction of the Slaughter of the Innocents and the collapse of Herod, the dramas of Gambella, like Matthew, record that there was (and are) opposing forces to the picture of universal joy at what has taken place at the stable, while also suggesting through the collapse of Herod that what has taken place earlier in the drama, though hidden from view, remains what is decisive and of ultimate effect. The act-image of the collapse of Herod offers the vision of the drama's act-possibility as one of the vanquishing of the tyrants of this world in the face of the coming of God's kingdom that is at one with visions of emancipation and with its scriptural foundation where, in Luke's words, 'the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace'.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 63-100 (p. 100); 'Ideology and Utopia', in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 324.

<sup>61</sup> Luke 1:79.

However, there may be a potentially deadening sameness within traditional drama that is annually repeated, for the audience as well as the actors know exactly what will take place. Such drama may become the event that is attended because it is the traditional activity, without encouraging any engagement other than that of being present. Yet, it is also the very repetition of the annual Christmas drama that enables it to act almost liturgically, drawing Christians in fellowship around the presence of the unchanging story at the heart of the Christian message. There is a need for such repetition, as is provided within Anglican liturgical practice (as within more secular celebration), that the traditional Christmas drama also serves. Just being present enables the possibility of engagement at many depths, and one that may be different for each individual within a community and even for each individual at each repetition of the drama.

## 8.8 Conclusion

I return to the question of my title: the Slaughter of the Innocents – a comedy? That the Christians of Gambella have chosen to use a comic format rather than one of worshipful solemnity is their developed tradition with which they celebrate the joy of the Incarnation. The celebratory fun demands a comedic form. The slaughtered children of the textual narrative remain a minor and almost un-noticed voice. The drama is of the collapse of Herod's power in the wake of the birth of 'God's Lamb' that means 'the saving of the world' (*Michael*). Christianity has the Incarnation at its heart. Despite the traumas of life, the drama enables 'remembering' by 'showing people directly' (*Wilson*) at the crucial *kairos* moment in the middle of the night when the Church traditionally celebrates the high-point of its Christmas feast. This story of hope is held within the joy of the Christmas drama, for as *Peter* proclaims: 'They are happy, they joy, they will have hope.' They remember, they celebrate, and they look forward in faithful expectancy.

This chapter has used Beckerman's modes of the showing of iconic and the telling of dialectic performance to make sense of the traditional Christmas dramas of Gambella, that in their role at the heart of their celebration remain fundamentally iconic in character. There is little room for the experimental interpretative work of fresh devising. The Anglicans of Gambella have begun to widen their use of biblical drama from this basis in the Christmas dramas, and it is to this more recent development that I now turn.



## Chapter Nine

### Fossils or Living Stones?

#### **Biblical Drama in Gambella: Hermeneutical Tensions within the Call of Tradition**

This is the special, the special drama. [...] We need a full message. [...] we will choose *Temptation* and *Lost Boy* and *Good Samaritan*. They are the real message. You see, they are special. (Darash Thatha Ojulu)<sup>1</sup>

There is some histories in the Bible that didn't show to the peoples as a drama. We may need to adapt. We may need to create a new drama from the Bible. We should be able to do it. (Luk Galla Ochalla)<sup>2</sup>

Thus far I have investigated two different types of biblical drama, firstly, freshly devised drama as a process of fresh interpretation to which the form of drama makes a distinctive offering, and secondly, the traditional drama that acts as a form of cultural memory, while appearing to leave little room for fresh interpretation. As types, each has their parallel in one of the opening quotations.<sup>3</sup> Together, the statements offer a sign of the tension between these two desires: to perform the 'special' drama that forms their tradition, as advocated by *Darash*, or to experiment with making 'new drama' which necessarily demands fresh embodied interpretation of the text, as advocated by *Luk*. The purpose of this chapter is to tease out this tension, as I encountered it in Gambella, in order to consider how this might impact on the making of drama as a tool of scriptural interpretation and of Christian formation, as is the primary concern of this study. Ricoeur's account of tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Drama Project, Tuesday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For Christmas drama see chapter eight; for Morning Prayer dramas see chapters five to seven.

existing within a polarity between sedimentation and innovation provides the theoretical foundation for this work and is placed in dialogue with his perception of ideology and utopia (chapter five), and also with Beckerman's description of iconic and dialectic modes of performance (chapter eight). This theoretical foundation underpins my analysis of the men's discussion of their choice of drama to perform, and is followed by an investigation of the differing present practice of devised biblical drama within the Anuak and Nuer Anglican churches of Gambella.

### **9.1 A Ricoeurian View of the Hermeneutical Tensions within Tradition**

The tension between tradition and new creation was writ large within the men's discussion of what drama they would choose to perform for the Sunday Programme. The minority call for new drama, 'I think *those* are not new for us' was overthrown by the assurance that tried and tested dramatization formed the 'best speech'. The tension between the men was reversed within my own response. Seeking to research drama as a tool of present interpretation, I was presented with the tradition that was more concerned with faithfully repeating past performances than in looking with fresh eyes at passages from Scripture. In overly-hasty critique I described such traditional dramatization as 'fossilized', contrasting it with the fruitfulness of freshly devised 'living stones' that could act as a draw toward transformational possibilities.<sup>4</sup> Yet, fossilization cannot be equated with 'tradition', for I have already demonstrated the relevance of the Christmas dramas for Gambella. Though firmly bound within their traditional rendering, these dramas form festal celebratory affirmations of identity that offer potentially formative and transforming

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<sup>4</sup> I Peter 2: 5; Anthony C. Thiselton contrasts 'transformational possibilities' with 'fossilized' biblical interpretation, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 8-10.

experiences of the Incarnation. Using my terms that need further qualification, they are 'living stones' rather than 'fossilized' tradition.

Ricoeurian hermeneutical theory offers a way beyond simplistic critique that looks only for new interpretation, by mediating between opposing polarities of static, unchanging 'sediment' and fresh, developing 'innovation' within tradition itself.<sup>5</sup> Ricoeur writes of tradition as a 'stratified structure', 'assembled like a pile of sheets of paper' and whose 'acquisition' forms a '*habitus*', or way of life.<sup>6</sup> His metaphor of sedimentation offers a picture of tradition as previously formed, lain down through a gradual building up of the bed-rock of handed-on culture on which lives are formed and grow. This is the affirmational role of the 'concretion of identity' within Jan Assmann's account of cultural memory, as previously discussed (chapter eight), ensuring the continuation of communal beliefs and identity.<sup>7</sup> Innovation, on the other hand, speaks of an oppositional draw of discontinuity, away from the sedimentary tradition through fresh creativity, as cultural memory's 'capacity to reconstruct' within and for its own time and place.

At first sight, sedimentation and innovation appear reminiscent of my initial use of 'fossil' and 'living stone'. However, for Ricoeur, as for Assmann, the terms are less polemic, forming a *necessary* dynamic between 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' within the transmission of cultural memory, that Ricoeur designates as 'traditionality', so covering a

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 20-33 (pp. 24-25); *Time and Narrative*, 3, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), p. 219.

<sup>6</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', trans. by John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, 65, Cultural History / Cultural Studies (1995), 125-133 (p. 126).



broad spectrum between 'servile repetition' and 'calculated deviance'.<sup>8</sup> Innovation, without the mediating balance of sedimentary tradition may become 'calculated deviance', losing all linkage with what has given it its initial birth. Within biblical interpretation, Anthony Thiselton perceives this as a 'destructive iconoclasm' that views 'all Christian tradition as negative'.<sup>9</sup> At the other extreme, sedimentation, without the mediating balance of innovation may become 'servile repetition' within 'the inert transmission of a lifeless residue', or using my term (as also used by Thiselton), 'fossilized' in no longer bearing any relevance within its present situation.<sup>10</sup>

My comment on traditional drama as fossilized was more that it appeared to lack any fresh interpretative investigation than that their drama had ceased to have any relevance within their context. By their nature as 'traditional', such dramas are pulled toward sedimentation. No more than I can designate these dramas as fossilized, was I looking for dramas where a 'destructive iconoclasm' no longer built upon Christian tradition to play its role in Christian formation. Rather, through the scriptural analogy of 'living stones' (made in I Peter of Christians and their relationship with Christ), I seek to extend its applicability to devised biblical drama as a present 'living' means of spiritual formation for Christians, in contrast to a fossilization that simply accepts and repeats without engagement, and thus in Ricoeur's terms, without appropriation of what had already been given.<sup>11</sup> For biblical dramas to be 'like living stones' they would carry a likeness to, or revelation of Christ, as '*the living stone*' who offers himself as a foundation

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<sup>8</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, pp. 219, 228; 'Life in Quest of Narrative', pp. 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, pp. 8-9

<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 24; Thiselton, pp. 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> I Peter 2: 4-5. For commentary on this passage, see for instance, David L. Bartlett, 'The First Letter of Peter: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections', in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12, ed. by Leander E. Keck and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 229-319 (p. 265).

on which to build one's life, and so such dramas are seen as playing their part in building a 'spiritual house' (verse 5) that could sustain and nurture those who participate in the activity.

Returning to Ricoeur's analogy and account of hermeneutical tensions, the danger inherent within sedimentation may, when mediated by the pull toward innovation become the positive force of a rooted and life-giving tradition. The danger inherent within innovation may, when mediated by the pull toward sedimentation become the positive force of a questioning and renewing creativity that refreshes tradition. The dynamic relationship between lively sedimentary tradition and creative innovatory interpretation may be mutually enriching, and is what I sought through my description of 'living stones'. Both spell life, and therefore continuity and relevance for tradition within the changing circumstances of geographical and historical context.<sup>12</sup>

Sedimentation and innovation are therefore in constant and necessary dynamic relationship within tradition. Each forms a continuing pull to both the settled and accepted and also towards the fresh and creative, both away from and also towards each other. Ricoeur argues that each contains the seeds of the other, acting as a draw towards its opposite mode of operation. Tradition is less the sediment of a fossilized 'lifeless residue' handed on from generation to generation than it is a 'living transmission' of what once had been innovation and that still holds the possibility of renewal and creativity within it.<sup>13</sup> Innovation does not come out of nowhere, but is a movement founded upon the sediment within tradition, whether as a development of what is there, or as a movement away,

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<sup>12</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 24.

towards a fresh direction. Seeds of innovation within the sediment of tradition call it towards fresh growth and relevant expression of itself, at the same time as the formed sediment resists change.<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur proposes that ‘we are never in the position of being absolute innovators, but rather are always in the situation of being heirs’.<sup>15</sup> He argues that without the backdrop of shared communal tradition, fresh creativity could not communicate itself. Rather than oppositional dichotomies, the terms in their neutrality cover the whole spectrum of approaches to tradition, while acting as its governing forces, as illustrated within my diagram below. It is this constant relational dynamic that works to keep tradition rooted, alive, relevant, and fruitful as the ‘living stones’ of my imagination.

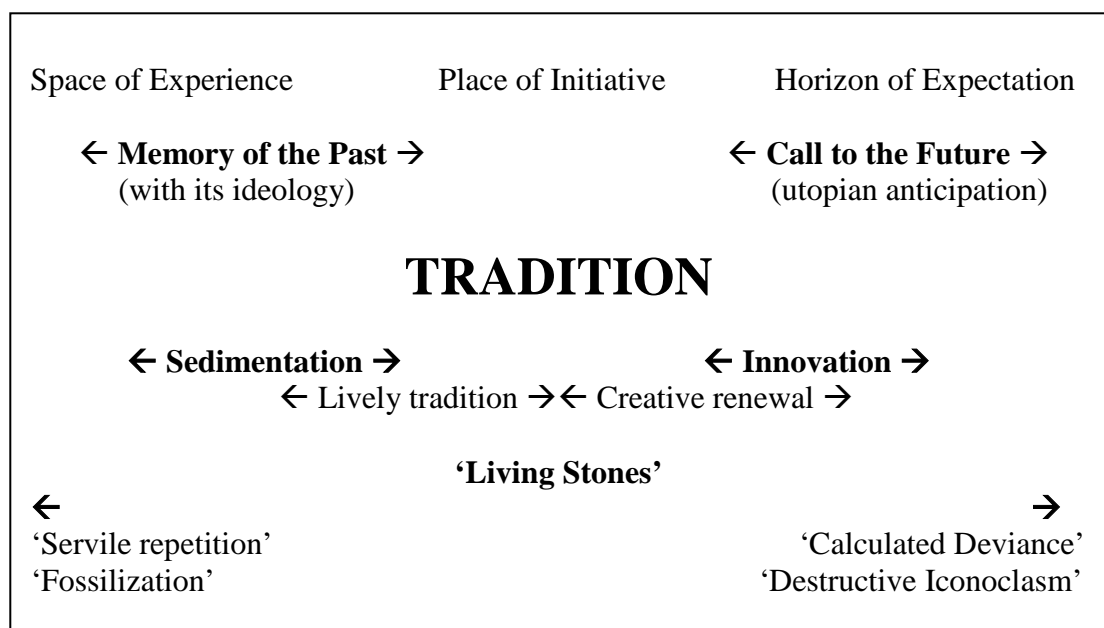


Figure 9.1 A Ricoeurian Account of Hermeneutical Tensions

This account of interpretation as tradition lies within Ricoeur’s perception of the telling of time as within the present ‘place of initiative’ where sense is made through dialogue ‘between the interpreted past and the interpreting present’, within the ‘efficacy

<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, p. 221.

of the past that we undergo and the reception of the past that we bring about'.<sup>16</sup> The sedimentary within the 'space of experience' pulls towards the past and its memory, while the innovative within the 'horizon of expectation' pulls towards the making of the future within the present 'place of initiative'. Ricoeur adds that each of these polarities is governed by the ideology and sense of utopia under which individuals within their communities live, offering 'authentic' or 'perverted' understanding according to their propensity toward his one universal assertion of the 'emancipation' that 'holds for everyone and always'.<sup>17</sup>

For Christians, authentic ideology through tradition and utopia as eschatology can be seen as carried within Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Understood through the horizon of the Incarnation, ministry, Passion and Resurrection of Christ, its promissory message is of liberation from all that binds, and of salvation as wholeness.<sup>19</sup> Devised biblical drama, therefore, needs to be placed under a double critique of listening and suspicion, firstly, through listening to its mediation between sedimentation and innovation, and secondly, and yet more importantly, to its presentation of values lying within its assumptions of truth. These assumptions are what carry the ideology and the eschatological expectations of utopia within a drama's use of the memory and hope that lie within the scriptural tradition.

Having used and extended (chapter eight) Beckerman's view of performance as within iconic and dialectic/dialogic modes, the relationship between these and

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<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3, pp. 208, 220-221, 230.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

<sup>18</sup> This is not to suggest Scripture as the only carrier of Christian tradition and eschatology, for it is also carried within Church Tradition, including its credal statements and its worship and practice. See, Paul Ricoeur, 'Ideology, Utopia, Faith', *Colloquy*, 17, 1975 (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 21-28.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, see Luke 4:18-19 (Isaiah 61:1-2).

sedimentary/innovative tradition as pairs of polarities can now be charted. As a mode of performance that seeks the static and stable within its display, the iconic bears clear parallels with sedimentation. This is a showing of the past that accepts it as it is and so appears to have little expectation of change in the future. Tending towards fossilization, the sedimentary and iconic display will offer a single-voiced view that will illuminate and set in stone rather than anticipate critique or change. The iconic and sedimentary drawn towards its livelier pole will be open to dialogic and innovative re-telling.

Dialectic/dialogic performance inherently carries the cause and effect of narrative and thus implicitly carries the possibility of innovation, development and change. Drawn away from the iconic and sedimentary, innovative dialectic/dialogic performance moves toward the iconoclastic until ultimately it ceases to be performance as tradition understands it, for it is the necessary task of the iconic pole to draw dialectic drama towards its nature as a framed showing. These pairs of polarities offer similarities, but not total parallels for the iconic and dialectic focus on the mode of performance, while the sedimentary and innovatory focus on the dynamic within tradition.

## **9.2 What Drama shall we Perform? A Call to Sedimentation or to Innovation?**

Having set the theoretical framework, I turn to Gambella and the church leaders' choice of drama for performance.<sup>20</sup> The discussion carried the opposing tensions of sedimentation, the urge to produce the known tradition, and innovation, an alternative voice seeking to prepare and present freshly devised dramas. It is not a stark choice between old, fossilised sediment and new, creative innovation, but rather one of movement from within the tradition for the unique occasion of a specific performance. Expressions of the traditional local repertoire of dramas may or may not slavishly copy the old, while

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<sup>20</sup> Drama Project, Tuesday.

freshly devised dramas continue or adapt hermeneutical and performance traditions already at work within the community. Yet, the tension remains, and was fully at work within the men's decision-making process, offering insight into what biblical drama is devised in Gambella and the way that it is used as a means of scriptural interpretation and Christian formation. I begin with a consideration of the desire for innovation.

*Peter* made the first call for fresh biblical drama, suggesting the story of *Lot and Sodom* (Genesis 19: 1-26) as an accompaniment for the traditional Christmas drama.

Why these? We can compare [Christmas with] the previous word [...]. Because the people they cannot know God they done many, many bad things, but now this went wrong way. If we can do drama for the people: *Lot and Sodom*, we can compare this drama and now.

This was an innovative suggestion to add fresh illumination onto the traditional Christmas drama as it is usually performed. Though the two dramas would carry a dialectical tension between them, the call was primarily for an iconic mode of performance to provide a picture that would provide a contrast of 'then' to act as a foil to better display the wonder of the message of 'now' given within the fulfilment of the Christmas drama, for it was *Peter* who had said of this drama, 'They are happy, they joy, they will have hope [...] the Son of God come to them, will take them to heaven because Jesus is alive for them.' *Peter*, as a first generation Christian, had made a decision to leave 'the previous word' of his own cultural tradition.<sup>21</sup> In calling for this drama, he seems to want to better portray what he sees as a contrast between the ideology of the 'bad things' done by those who 'cannot

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<sup>21</sup> As recounted within conversation.

*know God* with a utopian draw to the transformation and hope of new life offered by God who *can be known* through the decisive act of the Incarnation. For *Peter*, the Christmas drama symbolizes and forms the contemporary Church in contrast to his perception of all that Sodom symbolizes of life outside the saving ark of Christ and his Church.

Separately within the discussion, *Wilson Okello Akuay* and *Luk* also called for innovation through the making of new dramas. *Wilson*'s plea was specifically against the known tradition for something fresh:

I have thought on this. I have thought on celebrating *The Lost Boy*. Now, what we should do, the things we should do they should not know before. Now we have *The Lost Boy* there and celebrated already [pointed to a photograph of the drama that I had put on the wall] And they know, even our sister now know this [referring to me]. We celebrate that one. Also we celebrate *The Temptation*, and this they know also. What the meaning of this is: *we need a new one*. Yes, which is not there [pointing to the photographs].

*Wilson*'s statement, with his repetition of 'they' has a double reference. He is referring to the local audience who had been presented with these dramas at the Local Assembly and beyond. He also had a wider audience in mind who could already know these dramas through the photographs, for 'even our sister know this'. For *Wilson* the drama project offered a welcome opportunity to devise 'a new one'.

*Luk* spoke of possibilities for creating new drama as his conclusion to a long and impassioned speech. He had begun with an assertion of their responsibility as church

leaders: 'Don't forget that we are church leaders [...] And I need to remind you that the drama that we need to do, the history that we do from the beginning to end, need to be good.' He continued with his concern for their double audience, demanding drama that would 'be attractive for the audience who are here and the need to be attractive for the teachers [in UK]'. The nub of his argument came within his call for the courage to experiment, with which in abbreviated form I opened this chapter:

There is some histories in the Bible that didn't show to the peoples as a drama. We may need to adapt. We may need to create a new drama from the Bible. *We should be able to do it.* So, even, if we create new drama. *It is possible*, like now. Even the way how Jesus teach a person, or the way how Paul go to Damascus and fall down because of the speaking that come from heaven to him. This is a very big one. And if not that one, there is many histories in the Bible. We should have to choose and to make it as a drama, a new one.

These isolated speeches of *Luk*, *Wilson* and *Peter* indicate a dawning realisation among some of the men that devised drama offered further, as yet untapped potential. They indicate a desire to move forward from their tried and tested canon of drama, in order to extend their tradition through the innovation of exploration and play with fresh texts. Yet, there was no development from or support given to these isolated proposals of innovation, apart from a solitary, 'Yes, so we need the new one', from *John*. In a group of nine men, the three separate suggestions, supported by this fourth man could have worked together to make a case for innovation. Yet, it seemed as if the notion of devising fresh dramas was so novel that each man offered his own thoughts somewhat hesitantly and made no supportive response to each other's suggestions. Being unsupported by any continuing discussion,



these voices for innovation were no match for the alternative and confident voice for known tradition.

*Darash*, as the leading voice for the use of traditional drama gave his reasoned arguments in favour of their use, again with which in abbreviated form I opened this chapter:

Here is the Saviour through drama. Here, people are seeing. Drama is a way of responding to a message. *This is the special, the special drama. These are the message. This will tell the message to the people.* This is the reason, or objective we have. Because of this, we need a full message. We are the full message. These things will be given to these people. They will know. Maybe if we want we will choose *Temptation* and *Lost Boy* and *Good Samaritan*. They are the real message. You see they are special.

*Darash* speaks as an Anuak, for these as I shall further elucidate within the next section are the dramas of the developing Anuak tradition of devised drama. They are ‘special’ in offering what he perceives as the heart of the good news of Christianity: the *Temptations* is of ‘the defeating of the devil by Jesus’ (Matthew 4: 1-11); the *Lost Boy* (Prodigal Son, Luke 15: 11-32) ‘show that God cannot reject you’; and the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10: 30-37) is ‘the way of our Christianity’.<sup>22</sup>

This perception of the use of biblical drama acts closely in accord with Beckerman’s description of the iconic mode of performance as of a time of illumination

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<sup>22</sup> Focus group, Tuesday.

and fulfilment, for the 'special' nature of these dramas is claimed to contain the 'full message' of the Gospels.<sup>23</sup> Rather than as dramas of multiple voices, tension and suspense, they offer a 'full message' that speaks with one authoritative voice. The dramas are special because they encapsulate and symbolize the Gospel. Indeed, according to *Darash*, they do more than symbolically represent. The dramas *are* the Saviour. They *are* the message. They bring that which is not present into an *effecting* presence. The drama is a gift enabling the audience to see 'the Saviour', and so 'they will know'. The Gospel and its view of reality, as it is understood and presented in this context is displayed, affirmed and passed on as a living tradition. The seeds of creativity and innovation that remain at the heart of sedimentary tradition are affirmed as retaining their potency. Yet, it is also a limitation of the possibilities carried within Scripture in its assumption that these are the best stories to be shown through drama. However, *Darash's* case for tradition was made, heard and embraced. In the face of such assurance of a full and lively tradition of 'special drama', those individuals were silenced who had called for the uncertain experiment of fresh innovation, for within this perception these would have offered Gospel stories of less crucial import.

The move towards the point of choice for *The Temptations of Jesus* as well as for *The Lost Boy* both held and resolved the tension within tradition. *Peter* made a last appeal for innovation: 'I think those are not new for us.' It was rebuffed by *John*, now firmly moved to the cause of owned tradition: 'They are not new. They are *our* drama. We have the people who lead them all year. We know how to do them.' In this manner, *John* brought himself and the rest of the group to join the Anuaks within the fellowship of the self-identity of a shared tradition of cultural memory. The debate was carried by *Darash*,

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, ed. by Gloria Brim Beckerman and William Coco (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.1-2.

as the leader of the call for tradition, with the beginning of a statement that brooked no counter argument: 'But, if you want to make the best speech ...' A moment of focused silence ensued, the attention of his audience had been gathered as the men reflected on the force of what had been implied. *Darash* did not even have to make the final decision himself. It was *John* who spoke: 'Let us not keep talking on *The Lost Boy*. We select it now. Let us go to practice.' Yet, one thing more was necessary to make the decision complete. The reasoned argument required the enhancement of affective emotion to bring the decision firmly into communal ownership. This was provided through the invocation of the shared memory of glorious past performance, whether or not they had been present: 'When we took this *Lost Boy* to Itang, they cry!' There was silence for a moment before a repeated emphasis, 'They *cry*!'

There was no contesting parry. *John* responded: '*That* is what we wanted to show them.' Excitement erupted as memories of past productions were shared. Voices began to overlay each other. 'Remember when we do it then.' 'It was very fantastic.' '*Girma*, he fell down.' There was the shared laughter of a group who, despite their ethnic differences could still be united through this drama, for everyone had seen it earlier in the year at the Local Assembly (February 2011), even if they had never been involved in its production elsewhere. Remembrance of past glory led to present application, 'Let us practice it!' As established performance tradition, their choice allowed them to move straight from decision into enactment.

Consensus had been reached, and the whole group appeared purposefully united within this decision for traditional drama. 'They are not new. They are our drama. We know how to do them.' They are 'the special drama', and an iconic mode of performance

affirms and confirms the owned tradition of these churches, carrying authoritatively the norms and values of their Christian culture in relationship with their understanding of Scripture. As remembered and shared tradition, iconic drama draws the community into the fellowship of their local and global Christian identity. We are the people here who perform these Gospel stories in this way, 'Remember when we do it then.' Through their performance, they participate as one with the whole people who share these stories as their Gospel.

This was also a hermeneutical choice, for newly devised drama would intrinsically have demanded a fresh engagement with whatever portion of Scripture was being performed. The choice of traditional drama allowed the men to repeat the results of the former interpretative work without necessarily appropriating it to make it their own. The tension between the current tradition and new possibilities had been present in the men's discussion as well as in my own reaction. Yet, repetition is never complete, for the circumstances of production and of performance are changed. What may have been a lively rendering of the Gospel passages on a previous occasion may or may not be in its new circumstances.

### **9.3 The Present Practice of Devised Biblical Drama in Gambella**

I move from the fieldwork drama project to the practice of devised biblical drama by the Anglican churches of Gambella (as it was presented within focus group discussions) in order to show how biblical drama may develop within an orally focused community and the effect that this has on the making of meaning. Apart from the Christmas dramas, the

church leaders told of recently formed traditions of biblical drama.<sup>24</sup> The TEE scheme (2006-2009) had included biblical drama in its programme. The annual Local Assembly of the Anglican Churches, an official gathering presided over by the Bishop of Ethiopia, had included biblical drama as part of its programme (2009-2011) when Mission Centres (groups of churches) were asked to present biblical stories to ‘say something about the life of your Mission Centre in the last year’.

Beyond this ‘imposed’ use of drama, the men did not tell stories of fresh interpretation but spoke rather of a developing tradition of repeated dramas. The central feature emerging from our discussion was that the drama of these Anglican churches is occasional and festal rather than forming an everyday part of church life, or that its purpose is as a tool of biblical interpretation. Biblical drama in Gambella is generally organised ethnically, and beyond the shared but separate experience of Christmas dramas, the two ethnic groups within my study presented differing patterns of practice. For the Anuak Anglicans, biblical drama is most generally used as an offering of gospel stories at inter-church ‘conferences’. For the Nuer Anglicans, biblical drama is a means of celebrating the liturgical year. These will therefore be elaborated upon separately.

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<sup>24</sup> Focus group, Tuesday. The church leaders also spoke of wider experience of drama, on ‘development’ and ‘cultural issues’. Continuing use of devised biblical drama is attested on the Diocesan website <<http://www.dioceseofegypt.org/2014/10/made-us-teachers-2/>> and within the Blog of the current bishop of Ethiopia, Grant LeMarquand <<http://www.grantandwendy.com/>> [both accessed 3 December 2015] Thus far I have not found material on traditions of drama within the ethnic groups beyond what is used in this thesis. Jane Plastow, discussing investigations of traditional performance in Ethiopia writes, ‘the only specific examination of performance amongst the mass of Ethiopia’s over seventy ethnic groups has been a handful of undergraduate dissertations by students of theatre at Addis Ababa University and a preliminary investigation of four extreme-western peoples’, *African Theatre and Politics: The Evolution of Theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe* (Amsterdam: Radopi, 1996), p. 10. I have been unable to obtain the investigation: Peter Harrop and Aboneh Ashegrie, *A Preliminary Investigation of Dramatic Elements within Traditional Ceremonies among the Anuak, Majengo, Nuer, and Shako Nationalities of Illubabor Administrative Region* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1984).

### 9.3.1 Anuak Tradition: Biblical Drama for Inter-Church Conferences

The Anuak group reported that their use of drama was primarily confined to inter-church conferences where, they asserted, ‘two or three thousand people will gather’, from ‘all the villages, all the denominations’, sometimes, they suggested, for several days at a time. Within a conference programme dramatized Gospel stories may be included amongst each church’s contributions that would also include drumming, singing, prayer, speeches, and preaching within the time of wider fellowship and strengthening of community bonds.

Positioned in the midst of all the events that make up a festival, drama’s iconic and sedimentary nature and function would be to display and confirm the norms and values of this group who celebrate their faith and way of life together. On the other hand, dialogic, innovative drama would allow the space of festival to become one offering exploratory self-critique through multiple viewpoints on the community and its traditions, ways of life, sense of expectancy, and hopes. However, festive celebrations, as demonstrated by the Christmas dramas, are often times for tradition within the repetition of activities that bind a group together. For the Anuak Anglicans, it seems that the sedimentary pull of tradition is of greater force than that for innovation.

Only three stories from the gospels were mentioned as forming dramas (the *Temptations of Jesus*, the *Lost Boy*, and the *Good Samaritan*). Presented as offering key summaries of the Christian message (see page 312), they formed *Darash*’s suggestions for the fieldwork Drama Project. Each had also been enacted at Anglican Local Assemblies, as in the photographs on the next page.

Figure 9.2 Anuak Dramas Performed at Local Assembly<sup>25</sup>



*The Lost Boy* (2011)



*Temptation of Christ* (2010)



*The Good Samaritan* (2010)  
(here performed by the Opo)

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<sup>25</sup> Photographs by Janice Proud.

*The Lost Boy* also forms an essential warm-up to the Anuak presentation of the Christmas drama. *Girma Obang Olok* stated that this was ‘to make the people to be happy’. *Luk* explained its use to help fill in the long evening, ‘because time is too long’, however adding that it made its own particular contribution to the evening: ‘because they will need to have the drama *which is very important* to let the people be interested’. The drama appears within a twin concern for entertainment and efficacy, illustrating Richard Schechner’s assertion of such an entwining within most performance.<sup>26</sup> *The Lost Boy* not only entertains but is seen to offer a pertinent introductory commentary on the Christmas drama.

Further consideration of *Darash’s* assertion of the theological significance of *The Lost Boy* as showing that ‘God cannot reject you’ suggests an aspect of Christianity that may be of particular importance for the Anuak churches. They saw a metaphor of God within the loving father of the parable who welcomes his son’s return and who pleads with the elder son that ‘all that is mine is yours’. This perception of God is in striking contrast with their ‘primordial’ spirituality where *Jwok*, though the spiritual force behind creation, is viewed and encountered as hostile, confrontational, and destructive.<sup>27</sup> Dereje Feyissa describes the Anuak perception of *Jwok* as ‘a belligerent force posing a common threat to their existence’, with the result that Anuak life has to be ‘defended against “encroachments” by *Jwok*’.<sup>28</sup> The nature of ‘God’ for the Anuak who embrace Christianity

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Schechner, ‘From Ritual to Theater and Back: the Efficacy – Entertainment Braid’, in *Performance Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), pp. 112-169 (p. 162).

<sup>27</sup> Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), p. 16, pp. 44-46. This perception of *Jwok* accords with what had been presented in TEE discussions amongst the church leaders (*Worship* module), October 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Feyissa, pp. 16, 44.



has to be fundamentally re-defined. Preceding the Christmas drama, *The Lost Boy* offers its picture of the God of Christianity who 'cannot reject you'. Through this understanding of *The Lost Boy*, the Incarnation within this context is not only 'God *with* us' (Emmanuel), but more importantly, 'God *for* us', rather than *against* us.

Of the three Anuak dramas, the fieldwork group chose to present *The Lost Boy* and *The Temptation of Christ*. Here, I shall look more closely at the drama of *The Temptation of Christ*, setting *The Lost Boy* aside to form a focus within the next chapter. The preparation of the *Temptations* for performance indicates its firmly traditional nature, for the men endeavoured to recreate past performances within the present situation through their use of an act-scheme with narration, costume, *and* actors who had prior experience. *Michael* (not an Anuak) explained: 'We look first for the best of our experience. Anyone who has the experience, he will know this is how that drama. We select the person who played [before].' There seemed no expectation or desire to look afresh at either Scripture or the method of its performance, suggesting that it was to be a drama that was firmly drawn toward the sedimentary rather than the innovative. This was emphasized by the seemingly crucial nature of re-creating a past costume for Satan. Far longer was taken over discussing the need for money to buy grain sacks and in its making than was spent on rehearsing, suggesting their perception of an import in creating an impressive spectacle. Every indication, reinforced by photographs from the 2010 Local Assembly (compare the photograph on page 318 with 321, 323), was that not only was this to be a drama of the sedimentation of re-enactment, but also one that was to be performed primarily within the iconic mode.

The drama of *The Temptations of Jesus* as performed at the fieldwork's Sunday Programme was primarily one of iconic display. It was centred on a contrast between Jesus and Satan, who danced around Jesus' feet with jerky, pouncing movements, making very un-human clicking noises: 'k-k-k-k-k'. Visually, gestures formed the only indicator of each temptation. The story, using Matthew 4: 1-11, was told by narrators (Anuak and Nuer), turn by turn. Satan spoke through these narrators, while Jesus' only speech was the three biblical verses assigned to him within Matthew's text. Jesus, robed in his white garments suggesting purity, was relatively static and unmoved, showing no anxiety or indeed any emotion in the face of Satan. Satan tempted, but there was little if any sign of temptation, merely the ineffective attempts of Satan to tempt.



Figure 9.3 Sunday Programme: *The Temptation of Christ*<sup>29</sup>

Clues from within Matthew's text offer a more nuanced narrative, indicating by what is said and within that which is unsaid that an emotional battle takes place, rather than

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<sup>29</sup> Photograph by Julia Meiklejohn.

the drama's suggestion of a confrontation where word is simply triumphantly trumped by word. The passage opens with Jesus' 'famished' hunger (verse 2), a sensory response emphasizing his humanity of which there was no sign in the Gambella drama, unless within the narration.<sup>30</sup> It is this that leads to the first temptation. Each of Satan's speeches suggests an inner and all too human, and even worldly desire within Jesus as he considers the nature of his forthcoming ministry.<sup>31</sup> It is only because Jesus has something to really confront in obediently following his path within the kingdom of God that Satan is able to tempt him, indicating a tension between what he could do and what he knows and decides he is called to do.<sup>32</sup> Such an interpretation fits with Christian tradition's normative insistence that Jesus is fully human as well as fully divine. This is held within the possibilities of the text, but not within the shown drama. The biblical narrative offers dialogical interpretative possibilities that the iconic dramatization did not, with its seemingly docetic Jesus displayed as more transcendent than immanent, with little 'humanity' beyond his physical appearance (though even this was robed in the white of purity).

The drama drew its audience into the story through relationship with Satan rather than with Jesus. While the impassive Jesus was distanced, Satan was all too literally in the audience's face, making forays among them, particularly to the children, so demanding their participation. Through this engagement the solemnity of the textual narrative became

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<sup>30</sup> M. Eugene Boring makes this point, in 'The Gospel of Matthew: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections', in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. by Leander E. Keck, and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 87-505 (p. 163).

<sup>31</sup> John Proctor interprets this as Jesus clarifying 'in his own mind the way in which his vocation and service must develop', in *Matthew: The People's Bible Commentary – A Bible Commentary for Every Day* ((Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2001), p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Boring describes this as the 'real conflict' within the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, 'The Gospel of Matthew', p. 164.

one of comic fun, particularly developed through the half-gleeful, half-fearful response of the children. By forcing interaction with Satan, while Jesus was distanced and could only be watched, the drama perhaps suggests there is little perceived help for its audience in the face of temptation. Yet, *Darash*'s reason for choosing this drama was that Jesus' victory over Satan offered support for contemporary Christians: 'There is temptation: it cause the separation but now God is with you to support people.'



Figure 9.4 Satan makes repeated forays into the audience<sup>33</sup>

Within the drama Jesus was presented as a perfect example of what to do in the face of temptation, but unapproachable in his nature that was so different and so separated from that of the audience. It was the iconic, analogical depiction of the harsh reality of temptation in the form of the comic pouncing Satan from which the audience could not escape, though not within the situations of ethical responsibility that were faced by Jesus in the biblical passage and are faced by humanity within their daily lives. In the face of this

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<sup>33</sup> Photograph by Julia Meiklejohn.

Satan, the audience laughed, and that cuts the enemy down to size.<sup>34</sup> At Jesus' final speech Satan slunk away, defeated by Jesus, but not noticeably conquered, as he made his last attacks on the audience before leaving the room.

As Satan retired two angels entered (verse 11). Un-costumed, they were signified by the white cloth that they carried between them. Held high, they used it to cover Jesus as they 'waited on him' and accompanied him on his journey that took him off the stage, away from his temptations and, one can presume, onward toward his ministry (see photograph, below). The act-scheme and –image intimated its possible act-inner-life, that for me suggested that Jesus had begun a journey in which, dressed in his own purity he is also covered and protected by the purity of divinity. Held high, and therefore fluttering, the white cloth, beyond the angelic comfort could also have been a symbolic representation of the power of the Holy Spirit of Luke's account.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 9.5 Jesus waited on by Angels (rehearsal)

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<sup>34</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Luke 4:1, 14.

The presentation of the *Temptation of Jesus* as a battle between Satan and a transcendent, unaffected Jesus seemed to offer little comfort or support for its actors' and audience's own experience of temptation and battle with Satan. By producing the iconic drama that seemed to be considered as the only way to dramatize the *Temptations* there was little that the drama could say to the formational needs of those who watched it, for the dramatization seemed to offer little draw toward an attainable future. To do so would have required a more nuanced, less iconic approach. In their concern for a close repetition of previous performances the men did not appear to question what function the drama really fulfilled beyond that of offering a dramatic spectacle of Jesus' conquest of Satan. Though lightened by the entertainment and play afforded by Satan's forays into the audience the drama suggested that for humanity Satan was not yet fully conquered, except within their temporary laughter.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, seeing this Anuak drama through the perception of Feyissa's description of *Jwok*, the drama can be interpreted differently, as representing Christ's triumph over the malevolent *Jwok* of Anuak spirituality. *Darash* had said, 'There is temptation, it cause the separation, but now God is with you to support people.' In Anuak perception, *Jwok* is not only separated from those he created, he is antagonistic towards them. In contrast, the God known through Jesus Christ is 'God with us', a 'support [to] people'. Perhaps, what to my perception was a docetic Jesus, in Anuak eyes was 'God with us' on earth, visibly unperturbed by Satan/*Jwok*, and who, in his superiority, sent him away. Despite retaining power among the human audience, such a *Jwok* (represented as Satan) is actually laughed at, and cut down to size loses his ability to terrorize. In this view, though it remains my

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<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 91.

interpretative wager, this drama remains a ‘living stone’ for Anuak Christians, for through Jesus’ triumph over *Jwok* they are enabled to follow Christ into the future with hope under the banner of the protecting angels.

Within our focus group discussion, the Anuak group presented a picture of a small repertoire of a tradition of dramas that now form an established part of the pattern of ecumenical church life, even though of only recent provenance, for they maintained that in the past there had been no use of drama beyond the Christmas one. Though they did not acknowledge it as such, the present use of drama is likely to have developed from a period of TEE lay-training in which several of Jesus’ parables were dramatized, amongst which were *The Lost Boy* and *The Good Samaritan*, for as *Darash* explained, these dramas had been introduced to the other churches by the Anglicans of Gambella (and he named men who had been TEE tutors). It seems that devised biblical drama, within their ecumenical setting as part of Anuak inter-church conferences, had been an innovative addition to the established traditional pattern of activity. Though a relatively recent addition, these dramas appear to have quickly become established and acquired a set form, and using Ricouerian terms formed a *sedimentary* layer, within the expected programme, as *the* Gospel dramas. There seemed little expectation of any such innovation as that of devising dramas from any further stories from Scripture, for these ‘special’ dramas, according to *Darash* offer ‘the Saviour through drama’ as ‘the full message’ of the Gospel.

In the claim of what forms ‘the special drama’ that presents the ‘full message’ of the Gospel, the story at the heart of Christianity of the Crucifixion and Resurrection was conspicuous by its absence. In discussions of celebrating Easter the group stressed the solemnity of the celebration. Good Friday, *Luk* reported, is for ‘fasting and praying silently

[...] in the great, great hard thinking about how Jesus was crucified [...] after that there will be preaching.’ Easter day is celebrated with Scripture and preaching, and song ‘with the very great triumph’. Drama, it seems, may not be suitable for the solemnity of congregational worship as intimated by *Darash* when speaking about the contribution of their choirs to Sunday worship: ‘They will come quietly, they are showing their respect.’ The large gatherings of ‘conferences’ provide a venue for comic drama that is beyond the bounds of the necessary reverence of church worship, offering a didactic opportunity for presenting their encapsulated Gospel message. *Luk* and *Wilson*’s call for fresh drama indicates that despite the urge for repetition and sedimentation, there is also a draw towards innovation that could offer the opportunity for a widening repertoire that would necessarily demand fresh dramatized interpretation.

### 9.3.2 Nuer Tradition: Drama for the Christian Year

In contrast to the Anuak practice of biblical drama, the Nuer group-report was of their use of biblical drama as a means of celebrating the Christian Year, particularly focusing on Easter and Christmas, and for some Pentecost. Receiving and embracing an annual gift of the *Common Worship* lectionary, Nuer Anglican worship is arranged around its cycle of readings that frame their year.<sup>37</sup> Their dramatized engagement with Holy Week and Easter follows this lectionary and the liturgical pattern that they share with many Christians throughout the world, for: ‘We start on that day [Palm Sunday] according to the lectionary, and we follow it from the lectionary.’ The shared activity builds through ‘four programmes, different occasions, different days’ from Palm Sunday, through Holy

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<sup>37</sup> The Church of England’s *Revised Common Lectionary* is an annual gift to each church leader in the Anglican Church of Ethiopia from the Egypt Diocesan Association. Nuer Anglican Church leaders spoke of the leaders of other (Nuer) Protestant churches in their areas coming to consult this lectionary, forming a truly *common* lectionary. Though the Anuak Anglicans receive the lectionary it seems not to have become such an important part of their church life.



Thursday and Good Friday to Easter Day, 'the biggest celebration'. In telling of their dramatic practice at Easter the church leaders inter-mingled descriptions of symbolic liturgical acts, such as a cross to which people 'take their sins by symbol of taking stones' with dramatic re-presentations of the Gospel stories.

In *Peter's* account of the liturgical celebrations of Palm Sunday, local dramatic practice freely merged with the biblical account in such a way that it becomes difficult to know which is which:

When Jesus go to Jerusalem, he send two people to fetch the donkey, so when the donkey come, Jesus go with the people. They [the people] hear something's there and they put the leaf of tree or somethings on the road and there is the song also, for they are happy that Jesus comes. There is songs. This song: 'It is the Son of God!' People shouting. We are doing this afternoon times after morning [service]. We prepare the day for us. We are joys. There is marching also. We visit ourselves, home to home.

Within the drama there is no careful interpretative analysis of the Gospel accounts, but rather the broad brushstrokes of the fundamental story-line shared by them all.<sup>38</sup> The story from the past of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem involves the church congregation beyond spectating and hearing through their active participation. They immerse themselves within the story by entering into it in bodily terms.

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<sup>38</sup> Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-19; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19.

The drama not only illustrates and enacts the Gospel accounts, but moves beyond them as its enactors make the story their own. Louise Lawrence proposes that such approaches to Scripture follow the path of Jewish midrash, as they are re-told for the present life of the community, in that it ‘stretches, realigns and shapes a malleable text into contemporary relevance’.<sup>39</sup> The congregation, both acting as the first-century crowd and as themselves, follow a member of their community, representing the first-century Jesus, riding a bicycle, representing a first-century donkey, in a procession that moves beyond the act-image of the road into Jerusalem and Jesus’ triumphal entry, to spatially embrace the present time in Gambella through their visitation of the homes of those who form this contemporary fellowship of the followers of Christ. In the Gospel accounts the crowd accompanies Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem, but in the drama, according to *Peter’s* perception, it is Jesus who accompanies the present congregation as present-day participants in the way of following Christ. The drama’s act-scheme and act-image blend into each other as Jesus ‘go with the people’, and through his enacted presence *is* made present within the world in which they live. Dramatic re-telling of the past story and symbolic present liturgical activity intermingle within the iconic performance of ritual enactment formed by the liturgical procession, offering its participants a heuristic experience of both accompanying and being accompanied by Christ in the midst of their fellowship within the Church.

This liturgical form of dramatic re-presentation sets the pattern for what takes place throughout Holy Week in the Nuer Anglican churches as they follow the narrative of the passion, as it is presented in Scripture, through to their symbolic dramatization of the

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<sup>39</sup> Louise Lawrence, *The Word in Place: Reading the New Testament in Contemporary Contexts* (London: SPCK, 2009), p. 131.

empty tomb within their churches on Easter Sunday morning, and as depicted by the following photographs taken during a focus group session.



Figure 9.6 The Empty Tomb<sup>40</sup>



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<sup>40</sup> Focus group, Friday.

A photograph from St Luke's Church in Gambella showed within the half-light of the church, a candle-carrying church leader, vested in his alb, visiting a tomb made out of wooden school desks.<sup>41</sup> Within our discussion, *Peter* once more acted as spokesperson:

Early morning all the people they fast themselves. Early morning, according to the number of the people, even though you have ten children, they will buy each of the people one candle, one candle, one candle according to your number at the time; one candle for each person. So, we can prepare the tomb, and we can prepare the two people, Mary Magdalene and one of the, [interrupted, he corrected himself] Yes, three people. They will come to see the tomb. Where we see the tomb, tomb is empty. They run back to tell Peter. So Peter come again, [again interrupted] Yes, John, together to see the tomb. And then they took this message to all the disciples.

Within *Peter's* account, the drama of the story and the symbolism of the activities, again embraces every member of the congregation. The buying of candles is an expensive act for families within this community and *Peter's* repetition of their extravagant usage within the liturgy attests to their import. *Peter's* intermingling of the pronouns 'they' and 'we' suggests that each member of the congregation processes with a candle to visit the empty tomb: '*They* will come to see the tomb. Where *we* see the tomb, tomb is empty'. Seeing the empty tomb for themselves, the people from this congregation are surrounded by their candles that can be seen as representing the unextinguished 'light of Christ' within

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<sup>41</sup> The photograph was of Easter morning, 2006 and was reminiscent of the description of the *Quem Quaeritis* of the medieval church, in *This is my Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages*, by Michal Kobińska (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 77-78.

their world.<sup>42</sup> Like the first century disciples, this congregation may also bear witness to the Resurrection. The story from history within its dramatic re-presentation within the liturgy becomes the story of their cultural memory, for while shared with other Christians who celebrate on this day, it has become a story of their own experience, in and for the present of this here-and-now.

During the first focus group discussion *Michael Anyar Garang* had suggested that biblical drama was ‘from those who know the Bible’ so that ‘the people who will not know the Bible will see by their eyes’. Within this use of liturgical drama congregations are not only shown a ‘picture’, they themselves form the picture as an experienced event. They ‘see’ through their own participation in the re-telling of the Easter story.

The provenance of this use of symbolic liturgy and drama as a carrier of the story at the heart of the Christian tradition is somewhat uncertain, particularly as all the men insisted that the Presbyterian Church of their background had strongly discouraged any use of symbolic activity within the church.<sup>43</sup> *John* commented that the founding missionaries had discouraged all use of drama except for the Christmas one: ‘You see, drama is very not allowed; just remember.’ His analysis of this Presbyterian attitude to drama perceived it as part of a concern to move converts away from their traditional ethnic culture into a totally new way of life.

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<sup>42</sup> In many Anglican churches throughout the world the phrase ‘The light of Christ’ is sung three times as a paschal candle is raised high before the congregation. See for instance, Church of England, *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p. 331ff.

<sup>43</sup> As yet I have found no documentary evidence to support this perception of the attitude of the Presbyterian Church toward drama.

Things are very restricted because they are saying that we are changing from the Culture to the Christian culture. They say it in that way. Because they don't want to involve anything like the Culture [...] They just making things normally [without symbol]. They don't show any, some kind of sign, of drama. [...] They don't see it [drama] in a Christian way.

The implication of this comment is that symbol, drama and dramatization, forming a part of their traditional ethnic culture, was therefore suspect in that it could lead these new Christians back toward the ways of their former primordial religion.<sup>44</sup>

In support of this perception, Evans-Pritchard's classic account of *Nuer Religion* presents an indigenous deeply symbolic approach to sacrifice and religion, as indicated within the following extensive quotation:

Nuer religious conceptions are properly speaking not concepts but imaginative constructions. Hence, the response to them is imaginative too - a kind of miming. Words and gestures transport us to a realm of experience where what the eye sees and the ear hears is not the same as what the mind perceives. Hands are raised to the sky in supplication, but it is not the sky which is supplicated but what it represents to the imagination.

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<sup>44</sup> The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh concluded that African Traditional Religions "contained no preparation for Christianity". This is in sharp contrast to later views, amongst which John Mbiti claimed African Traditional Religions as a '*praeparatio evangelica*', quoted by Kwame Bediako, 'African Theology', in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David F. Ford, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 426-444 (pp. 427, 429).

Herein is a description of the mimetic nature of drama where the actualized is more important than the actual. Evans-Pritchard continues:

The spear he bought from an Arab merchant in the hands of an officiant representing a clan is in the mind's eye the spear of the ancestor in the drama of sacrifice. The ancestor's spear does not exist, and a man may make sacrificial gestures with this non-existent spear merely by moving his hand as though he held a spear in it, the ancestral spear being represented by nothing but a thought. A piacular [making/requiring atonement] ox is the sacrificer himself and in the ox he dies in symbol. But the sacrifice is not present. The hand on the back of the ox represents his hand. And when we look for the ox about to be slaughtered we see a cucumber.

The drama is performative, for what is represented through the act-scheme is, within the terms of its act-image and act-inner-life what actually takes place:

To the mind sickness caused by sin is the sin and in the mind it is wiped out by the sacrificial act. We seem indeed to be watching a play or to be listening to someone's account of what he has dreamt. Perhaps when we have this illusion we are beginning to understand, for the significance of the objects, actions, and events lies not in themselves but in what they mean to those who experience them.<sup>45</sup>

In view of the mimetic performativity involved in the sacrificial activity of their primordial religion, *John's* suggestion that the 'Presbyterian Church' had discouraged drama due to its

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<sup>45</sup> E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 321-322.

associations with the ways of Nuer tradition seems more than possible, especially in view of that church's reformed ecclesiological and theological development from puritan roots that were suspicious of symbol and sacrament as performative - and that had closed the theatres during the English civil war and Commonwealth.<sup>46</sup>

The symbols and symbolism of Evans-Pritchard's account are those of the Nuer primordial religion, rather than Christianity. Yet, setting this aside, Evans-Pritchard's account of the mimetic nature of Nuer sacrifice bears strong parallels with *Peter's* description of Palm Sunday and Easter morning. In both, the dramatic representative liturgical action not only re-presents but is seen to effect performatively what takes place in reality as well as within the imagined form, as *Michael* expresses when he says, 'And when we make the picture we really bring them to life again.' The liturgical performativity of the Nuer celebrations of Easter seems more than re-enacting, for they use spiritual activities through which the congregation participates within the present moment in its founding events and through which they may experience the grace of that participation.

The question remains as to the provenance of their present use of symbol and drama that had seemingly made such an innovative and transformative change to their former liturgical practice of Christianity. *Michael* suggested that drama had developed out of necessity during the civil war when people were making for safety across Sudan's borders. It was a situation of crisis in which there were few textual copies of Scripture: 'There were no Bibles, everyone who have knowledge, he use his brain to teach the people. That is why people, they know how to make drama. It was in that time.' Yet, this foundation in necessity and a didactic need was not the only story of the roots of their use

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<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 362, 512. See also bibliographic footnote 64, p. 252.



of drama and symbolic action. *Simon Ker Liah* implied the import of the effect of the TEE 'lay-training' module on celebrating Holy Week and Easter: 'I think these [the discussion] are not necessary, because they are no different from how you taught us.'<sup>47</sup> This course, less a didactic teaching of defined practice than that it encouraged the creative sharing of practical ideas of liturgical engagement perhaps opened up approaches to Easter that sat comfortably with their own inherited ethnic approach to the use of performative symbol and drama, enabling these churches to develop their own patterns of celebration.

It seems that perhaps the Nuer Anglicans of Gambella have an instinctive and inherited sense of the import of symbol within Christian worship that has encouraged them to use drama in a more liturgical manner than do the Anuak Anglicans, though they had experienced the same TEE course on *Holy Week and Easter*. Liturgical use of symbolic action demands a sedimentary use of tradition, for only so can it be the cultural memory that brings them into the fellowship of the shared tradition of practice that presents 'our story' with its norms and values, memories and eschatological expectancy. At the other end of the spectrum of tradition, innovatory liturgy where everything changes each time the community gathers is more likely to leave its congregation uncertain, uncomfortable and confused. The Nuer Anglican churches' use of liturgical drama is drawn toward the sedimentary, but has been able to make use of cultural memory's 'capacity to reconstruct' through innovatory creativity within the communities to develop a tradition that is relevant to their own needs.

The Nuer, and possibly also the Anuak Anglicans with their solemn word-based liturgy, seem to have come from a Christian missionary tradition that had discouraged the

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<sup>47</sup> TEE training, February-April 2006.

use of drama. Yet now, and for both groups, though in independent ways, biblical drama had been embraced and was forming a part of regular and celebratory, if infrequent church life. Each ethnic group had begun to build the sedimentary layers of their own tradition of biblical drama, but there seemed to be less expectation of using the same form innovatively to either present or explore other biblical passages, as evidenced within the discussion in which the participants in my fieldwork discussed what drama they would perform for the Sunday afternoon Programme.

#### 9.4 Conclusion

The use of drama by the Christians of Gambella, except for the long established one at Christmas, is of recent origin and therefore forms an innovative addition to church life. In the case of the Nuer churches, drama seems to some extent a reaction against their Presbyterian background in that they have now embraced a more symbolic and liturgical approach to worship that is built around the church year of their present Anglican home. At first sight, the Anuak use of key Gospel stories for their drama, unattached to any liturgical setting seems to favour a more word-based approach to their faith, for ‘this will tell the message to the people’. Yet, *Darash’s* presentation of these, as ‘the special drama’ that presents ‘the Saviour through drama’ suggests that they may also play a more symbolic function within church life as the ‘full message’, a view of the Gospel as embraced, carried and presented within just a few stories. However, these remain, as *Michael* insisted, a gift from ‘those who know the Bible [so that] the people who will not know the Bible will see by their eyes and put it into their heart’, whereas despite *Michael’s* comment, the Nuer liturgical dramas appear to engage the whole church community within a participative framework that blends the ‘history’ into every-day life.

Outside a clearly liturgical setting, it was the Anuak dramas that were chosen by the fieldwork participants as suitable for their need to play to what they perceived as a dual audience, that of their local context, but also the distant one of the recipients of my research. *Darash* had spoken of the dramas as fulfilling the local need. *John* spoke of their suitability for their unseen audience: ‘*Mary* is coming here to learn from us and to show this understanding to the people of her university, to read our mind. They have to read our understanding. When we show these two things, they have a very strong message.’ These Anuak dramas were clearly perceived as ‘the best’ that they had to offer me.

For the church leaders of Gambella their dramas were seen as ‘living stones’, presenting ‘the very strong message’ of ‘the Saviour through drama’ that would allow even those beyond their own context to ‘read our understanding’, as well as aiding the Christian formation of their own people through bringing ‘the history from the page to be seen by the people’, for in so doing, *John* proposed, they will ‘see by their eyes and put it into their hearts’. Yet, these dramas, though products of recent innovatory devising, have already formed a sedimentary layer of tradition and one that could run the risk of becoming fossilized if they lose their live-likeness. There is also a danger, if perceived as *the* dramas, of preventing the tradition of drama from developing any further innovation that would allow more ‘histories’ from Scripture, not only ‘to be seen by the people’, but firstly to be devised and so interpreted by those same people themselves.

This chapter has looked more closely at the developing practice of drama within the orally focused Anglican churches of Gambella. In contrast to my initial focus on the innovation of fresh biblical interpretation made by local Christian communities

themselves, it has discovered that the urge toward sedimentation responds to the Church's parallel need for a participative tradition of cultural memory that encapsulates the Gospel, reinforces identity and can be passed on to others. This can, perhaps, be seen as crucial in a Church who cannot rely on access to the written word by its members. The Anuak special drama that offered the 'Saviour through drama', as well as the Nuer liturgical drama is perceived as acting in a performative way to make present that which is enacted in the midst of their present context. This is a proclamation that is made manifest, requiring the closer investigation of the next chapter.



## Chapter Ten

### Proclamation as Manifestation

#### Making Present the Proposed Worlds of Scripture we could Inhabit

So drama is just helping a lot, because the same event, that first event *is now*, like from now. (Michael Anyar Garang)<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this final chapter is to investigate the relationship between devised drama as a means of the proclamation of Scripture that is necessarily interpretative, and the embodied, mimetic characteristic of drama to ‘make present’, for this is what can be seen as underlying *Michael’s* description. I bring the Gambella drama of *The Lost Boy* into conversation with theory using and developing the two threads of Paul Ricoeur’s essay on ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’.<sup>2</sup> Despite regarding them as polarities, Ricoeur also perceives them as intrinsically drawn toward each other within Christianity, as I have already suggested that the embodied nature of devised biblical drama mediates between telling and showing.

I follow the two Ricoeurian threads separately, firstly, through ‘proclamation’, so developing the roots of this thesis in Scripture as the Church’s foundational and formative text. Holding and remembering its founding past in God’s relationship with his creation, Scripture offers humanity a beckoning call toward the future, so according with Moltmann’s eschatological *Theology of Hope* that is built upon his reading of the

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<sup>1</sup> Morning Prayer Drama, Monday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’, in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. by Mark I. Wallace, trans. by David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 48-67.

promissory nature of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> As a people of this promise, the Church is drawn into engagement in a transformational future. Moltmann's work, like that of Ricoeur, is based upon a 'passion for possibility', so offering theological links that are specifically developed within Ricoeur's essay, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope'.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, I follow the thread of 'manifestation', developing, again with Ricoeur and Moltmann, the intimations and signposts within my work that call for further consideration of what it means to speak of the inhabitation of the proposed worlds of Scripture through drama. Running through my account of biblical drama in Gambella is the perception of the church leaders that their drama is a means of remembering the past by bringing its narrative into the present. *Michael's* remark, typical of many of the men's comments speaks of a perception of drama that, through its re-enactment does more than remember in that it brings the event represented by the drama into the 'now' of the present. There is an ambiguity within his comment, for he adds a representational '*like* from now', while yet he had begun with the stronger, seemingly ontological statement that 'the first event *is* now'. As an embodied medium, drama, through its mimetic nature intrinsically makes something of 'that first event' present within the here-and-now. This perception is supported by Ricoeur and Rowan Williams' insistence that Scripture 'invites' us *into* its 'proposed worlds' that we may '*inhabit*'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Freedom in the Light of Hope', trans. by Robert Sweeney, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 155-182.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102); Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 131-147 (p. 133).

‘Making Scripture present’ means that in some sense not only the ‘word of the Lord’ is made present, but through this, the Lord himself. Through drama’s embodied telling of the proclamation of Scripture, its’ invitation to inhabit proposed worlds offers a manifestation that may be perceived as sacramental in nature, and here, I follow David Ford’s ‘wide’ definition of ‘sacrament’, whereby ‘God and salvation are communicated through action and material reality’.<sup>6</sup> Such a view of devised biblical drama perhaps seems closer to Heidegger’s view of art as ‘a work that lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself’, than to Ricoeur’s symbolic account of mimesis, which rather than referring behind itself to its originating stimulus is a creative production that refers beyond itself, so opening up new possibilities.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as Williams reminds us, ‘God speaks in the response as in the primary utterance’, so encouraging this preliminary consideration of revelatory sacramentality through devised biblical drama to offer an initial exploration of beckoning possibilities that call for future research.<sup>8</sup>

### **10.1 *The Lost Boy* (Luke 15: 11-32)**

The drama of the *Lost Boy* forms the illustrative focus of this chapter. Already introduced as one of the small repertoire of Anuak ‘special’ dramas, I discuss it here as it was presented by the combined group of church leaders, using a mix of local language, at the fieldwork’s Sunday Programme. The drama (like the parable) was presented in four scenes, the first and fourth of a family ‘home’ (verses 11, 20), and the second and third in

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<sup>6</sup> David F. Ford, ed., ‘Glossary’, in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian theology in the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn ((Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 732-759 (p. 755).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, quoted by Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of the Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 2; Paul Ricoeur, see for instance, ‘Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation’, pp. 131-144 (p. 142), and ‘Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics’, pp. 165-181 (p. 181), both in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, p. 147.



the 'distant country' - a scene of 'dissolute living' (verse 13), followed by one in the 'fields' (verse 15). These provided the drama with three different contexts, each played as comic, returning to the first context for the resolution of the narrative.

The first scene was set with three chairs, on the middle one of which the 'father' leant back, relaxed and unmoving, suggesting a man at his ease without concerns of any kind. Prosperity and well-being were indicated by his t-shirt stuffed girth, constrained by a jacket, adding a touch of formality and the authority that demands respect. This was firmly and culturally endorsed by the stick that he held in his hand.<sup>9</sup> A scenario took place to one side, proving that here was a man who had nothing to do, for others worked for him. Two men, wearing traditional wraps and squatting on the floor, mimed that they were working in the fields, watched over by two men in modern dress standing above them, who themselves did nothing beyond forcing the workers to work even harder, while at the same time exchanging antagonistic looks and gestures between themselves. Posture, activity and clothing all indicated differing social status.

Leaving the 'field', all four men joined the father, clarifying positions within the household as the 'sons' sat on either side of their father, while the 'servants' sat on the floor at their feet - but only for long enough to establish the iconic picture (using Bernard Beckerman's terms).<sup>10</sup> The suggestion of the father's character displayed through the static image barely altered. There was no sign of relationship between the father and his sons. The bustle of activity was carried by the servants' obedient fulfilment of the father's unceasing demands. Yet the smiles on their faces depicted them as the most contented. The

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<sup>9</sup> The 'king' held a stick indicating authority throughout an Anuak 'cultural drama' (focus group, Wednesday).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Beckerman, *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, ed. by Gloria Brim Beckerman and William Coco (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 43-56.

expression on the brothers' faces suggested dissatisfaction, while the stance and facial expression of the father indicated self-satisfaction and self-importance.

The scene ended with the activity made explicit within the biblical parable. The younger son demanded his share of the family property (verse 12). The father ostentatiously displayed his wealth when he flourished his pile of paper 'money' and counted it out. There was a sharp intake of breath and open-mouthed astonishment from the children within the audience, who unused to plenty seemed to wonder if this money was *really* real. Receiving his 'share', the younger son's bodily and facial language depicted triumph in contrast to the anger displayed on his brother's face. With a shaking of fists at each other, endorsing the angry rivalry between them, the younger son left, followed by the other characters in order of their precedence, leaving the tension between the brothers hanging in the air.

The second scene was of the undescribed 'distant country' of the parable (verse 13) where the boy misused the independence that he sought away from his father. The Gambella tradition chooses to portray this distant country as an urban environment, setting two tables, one as a market stall and the other as a bar. A group of men sat drinking, talking and laughing. Ordered hierarchy had been exchanged for a rough and noisy camaraderie into which the younger son of the previous scene entered, flashing his wad of pretend money, ready to 'squander his property in dissolute living' (verse 13).

The men in the bar were eager to help the 'boy' in his task. He was enthusiastically welcomed, and encouraged to buy drinks for everyone before being taken to the market where he bought clothes for his 'new friends' as well as for himself. Having put them on,

he was escorted back to the bar to purchase more drinks for everyone - and the men began to dance. The scene was enacted so that it presented a growing crescendo of riotous drunken behaviour and noise, but it was only the younger son who lost complete control of the activity and events. In the midst of the dancing, with the boy's back strategically placed at the front of the acting area, the wad of money was taken by one of the other dancers from his back pocket - and everyone gleefully, but swiftly slunk away from the scene. All was quiet, except for the laughter of the audience, as the boy wandered drunkenly around the stage area and turning his back to the audience, mimed that he was urinating at the edge of the street. He wandered straight into the arms of the eager barman, who stripped him of his new clothes, and twirled him round several times before sending him on his drunken pathway offstage. Waving the new clothes, the barman leapt into the air and danced off in another direction, as the audience laughed and clapped.

The third scene suggested a traditional rural setting when the 'farmer' entered singing and talking gently to himself and his 'pigs' (two men crawling at his feet). The cloth wound around his head would gather the sweat from the day's sun, while the large leaves sticking out were insect deterrents. He carried a stick with which he poked and pushed his pigs, herding them away from wandering in the direction that they desired to go, directly into the midst of the audience (as with the sheep in the Christmas drama).



Figure 10.1 Herding the Pigs: the Farmer and the Lost Boy<sup>11</sup>



The lost boy entered, now wearing ragged t-shirt and trousers representing his poverty, though there was no indication of an unusual situation of the ‘severe famine’ that in the biblical text had swept through ‘that country’ (verse 14). Perhaps living in a

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<sup>11</sup> The photographs in this chapter were taken by Julia Meicklejohn.

subsistence-level situation, there is little need for its indication. The boy approached the farmer and was invited to look after his pigs. Handing his stick to the boy, the farmer stood to one side watching. The rest of the scene focused on the feeding of the pigs in relation to the boy's desperate hunger. As the boy and the pigs hustled each other to get at the food that had been left to the audience to imagine, the farmer entered the scrum, using the stick to enable the pigs rather than the boy to eat. This was a logical, as well as comically dramatized explanation for the boy's inability to share the pigs' food (verse 16).<sup>12</sup> In the scriptural text it is the son who makes the decision to leave the pigs and return home. In the drama, the boy was sent on his way by the farmer.

For the final scene, the circle of the narrative structure returned to the context of the hierarchy of 'home', and was played without the comic touches of the previous scenes. The father sat on his chair with his servants at his feet. The father's face was turned away in sadness. The elder son was not present. At the other side of the 'stage' the yet more raggedly dressed younger son entered and stood looking toward the 'home' he had chosen to leave. By placing the younger son's confession (verses 17-19) at this point in the drama, it was taken out of the previous comic scene, and visually opened this scene with a dual focus on the father and son, both in the sorrow of their estrangement.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Other explanations are given by Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 172; and Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. by S. H. Hooke, rev. edn (London: SCM, 1972) p. 129.

<sup>13</sup> Most commentaries perceive this first speech as the boy's moment of repentance, Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 130. For Bailey, this attempts redemption through works, rather than the grace that marks the boy's confessional response to the outpouring of his father's love (verses 20-21), *Poet and Peasant*, pp. 178-184.



Figure 10.2 Sorrow in Estrangement: the Father and the Son



In the textual narrative the son is spotted by the father from ‘far off’, and ‘filled with compassion he ran’ to embrace him (verse 20). Within the drama, the seated father did not spot the son until he had almost reached his destination. This gave neither time nor space for the father to move from his static stance to be able to ‘run’ towards his son. Truncating this movement seems a definitive distancing from what within the text

forms a clear activity. It was either deemed an unimportant piece of business, or as culturally inappropriate activity within their communities, they chose to follow their own cultural norm rather than the textual subversion.<sup>14</sup> The joy indicated within the fervent hug of the drama had to carry the whole emotion of the reconciliation. Amidst much ‘wa-wa-wa-ing’ by the father (an expression of pleasure) the lost boy was re-clothed by the servants, and his previous status was surpassed when the father gave his own cap to be placed on his son’s head, an equivalent of ‘the best robe’ and ‘ring’ of the parable (verse 22).<sup>15</sup>



Figure 10.3 Re-clothing the Lost Boy, watched by his Father

<sup>14</sup> Commentaries emphasise this running as a ‘most unusual and undignified procedure for an aged oriental’, an extravagant symbol of the depth of the father’s love. Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 130. Paul John Isaak entitles this parable ‘The Waiting, Running, Embracing God’ (my emphasis), ‘Luke’, in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. by Tokunboh Adeyemo and others (Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 1203-1250, p. 1235. For Bailey, this unseemly public rush by the father transfers to himself what could have been public humiliation for his son, *Poet and Peasant*, p. 181.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremias proposes this as the mark of authority of a signet ring, p. 130; Bailey, p. 185.



The father called on the neighbourhood, played by the rest of the actors, to join the celebrations.<sup>16</sup> To one side of the hugs and dancing of the party, the drama's focus moved to the elder son shown to be coming home. A re-buffed explanation of a servant preceded a dialogue between the father's pleas and this son's resistance to join the celebration. This is where the biblical parable ends, offering the reader an implied question of 'What would you do?'<sup>17</sup> The resolution left hanging by the parable was answered within the drama's conclusion. Resistance to his father's pleas was brief, for the elder son readily gave way and was led jubilantly into the party by his father.<sup>18</sup> The two brothers embraced, and danced together beneath the beneficent gaze of the father in the midst of the community – both enacted and actual. The applause was one of satisfaction that all had been made well, for through reconciliation the broken community was healed.



Figure 10.4 All is Well: The Lost Brothers Dance in the midst of the community

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<sup>16</sup> Jeremias designates this as a family party (*Parables of Jesus*, p. 130), which Bailey insists is culturally unlikely, *Poet and Peasant*, pp. 186-187. See also, Isaak, 'Luke', p. 1235.

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, p. 203, Jeremias, pp. 131-132.

<sup>18</sup> Isaak assumes the elder son does not go to the party, 'Luke', p. 1236.



## 10.2 ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’<sup>19</sup>

The drama of *The Lost Boy* presented the biblical parable. In doing so, Jesus’ oral story has changed form as well as its context of telling, once into Luke’s textual format, and secondly into the Gambella drama. All three forms proclaim the Gospel. Yet, it is only in the embodied drama that the story has become manifest within the materiality of the present.

In his essay investigating what he presents as the polarities of manifestation and proclamation Ricoeur describes their essential differences. Using categories from Mircea Eliade, Ricoeur opposes primordial religions where the sacred is encountered as non-verbal experience with those such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam that emphasise the word. He accentuates the differences to make clear their polarities, before looking for mediation between them, as shown within my diagram below.<sup>20</sup> Experiences of the numinous through hierophanies, defined by Ricoeur as ‘anything by which the sacred shows itself’, offer the immanence of God in natural time and space that has become sacred.<sup>21</sup> In Victor Turner’s terms they can be described as working within the ‘betwixt and between’ times and places of liminality.<sup>22</sup> Within religions of proclamation experience is displaced by the telling, hearing and teaching of the foundational word of God’s activity and relationships, tending to offer a more transcendent God and forming the community’s identity and its ethical norms. The ritual and the sacred use of the natural world and its cycles of manifestation become less important within proclamation than the remembering of the linear historical-

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<sup>19</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’, pp. 48-67.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 49-55, 55-61.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 95.

temporal narrative of God’s acts and promises in history. Finally, a close correspondence between nature and the sacred becomes within proclamation the ‘poetic language’ of metaphor and limit-expressions of Scripture. Though language can only begin to describe God and his relationship with humanity and his world, it is, as maintained throughout my thesis, this capacity of texts to use symbolic language that Ricoeur insists enables it to open up new possibilities for imaginative and creative understanding, drawing it away from proclamation toward manifestation.

	<b>Manifestation</b> Phenomenological: Heart and Imagination	<b>Christianity</b> Word-made-flesh	<b>Proclamation</b> Hermeneutical: Mind and Will
<b>Mode</b>	Non-verbal		Verbal
<b>What?</b>	Numinous: experienced	word of the Lord and	Revelation - Scripture: told and heard
<b>How?</b>	Hierophany: sacred places/times immanence	sacrament	Teaching: ethical transcendence
<b>Action</b>	Ritual (sacred activity)		Remembering
<b>Temporality</b>	Nature (cyclic)		Historic (linear)
<b>‘Language’</b>	Correspondence	Symbol	← Poetic language

Figure 10.5 Manifestation and Proclamation: Compared and Mediated<sup>23</sup>

Having outlined their contrasts, Ricoeur shows where the seeming polarities of manifestation and proclamation begin to draw together, for he suggests that, within Christianity, proclamation is ever pulled toward manifestation and not just through its use of symbolic language, as shown in my diagram above.<sup>24</sup> I suggest this propensity can be seen even within the strongest protestant traditions of *sola scriptura*, for, and here I return

<sup>23</sup> My diagram synthesizes Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’, pp. 49-67.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 65-67. See also, Mark I. Wallace, ed., ‘Introduction’, in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 1-32 (p. 18).

to Ricoeur, Christianity has at its very foundation its faith in ‘the word made flesh’ of the embodied and so contextual Incarnation. Secondly, Scripture itself is perceived as the ‘word of the Lord’, and so Ricoeur proposes it ‘takes over for itself the functions of the numinous’, as seen in John Webster’s insistence on Scripture as ‘Holy’ through its sanctification by God ‘for the service of his communicative presence’.<sup>25</sup> The proclamation of the Gospel as set forth in Scripture in its converting performativity has, Ricoeur proposes, ‘the power to set forth the new being it proclaims’.<sup>26</sup> In addition to Scripture, and particularly in more catholic churches, the numinous continues to be experienced within sacramental liturgy bringing together the proclamation of the word through remembering with ritual action and symbols of divine presence. Ricoeur proposes that in its “feeling of absolute dependence” ‘humanity is simply not possible without the sacred’, and wonders whether faith is possible without symbolism.<sup>27</sup> He concludes that humanity, as consisting of more than a cerebral will that requires the hermeneutical approach of proclamation, also needs the phenomenological aspects of manifestation that speaks rather to the imagination and heart:

In truth, without the support and renewing power of the sacred cosmos and the sacredness of vital nature, the word itself becomes abstract and cerebral. Only the incarnation of the ancient symbolism ceaselessly reinterpreted gives this word something to say, not only to our understanding and will but also to our imagination and our heart; in short to the whole human being.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’, p. 65. John Webster, *Holy Scripture: a Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 64, 65.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

Following Ricoeur, I suggest the necessary and holistic phenomenological/hermeneutical dynamic, as in his interpretative arc (chapter six), remains ever in force, for neither manifestation nor proclamation may stand solely alone as a means of making sense of our experience of the divine and his ‘word’ within our spiritual lives.

Having shown through Ricoeur that Christianity includes aspects of manifestation, I suggest that devised biblical drama also offers itself as a means for straddling the manifestation/proclamation polarity through its mimetic and embodied nature, as shown within my following diagram. Through its embodiment and performativity devised biblical drama, such as *The Lost Boy*, enables a proclamatory remembering of the foundational narratives through the manifest doing of mimetic enaction that offers itself as a symbolic re-presentation within the double nature of its time, space, and activity.<sup>29</sup>

	<b>Manifestation →</b> Phenomenological: Heart and Imagination →	<b>Christianity</b>  <b>Devised Biblical Drama</b>	<b>← Proclamation</b> Hermeneutical: ← Mind and Will
<b>Mode</b>	Non-verbal	Embodied	Verbal
<b>What?</b>	Numinous: experienced	Scripture: experienced	Revelation - Scripture: told and heard
<b>How?</b>	Hierophany: sacred places/times immanence	Re-presentation: double time/space making present	Teaching: ethical transcendence
<b>Action</b>	Ritual (sacred activity)	Mimetic remembrance	Remembering
<b>Temporality</b>	Nature (cyclic)	Double (now and then)	Historic (linear)
<b>‘Language’</b>	Correspondence	Mimesis	← Poetic language

Figure 10.6 Manifestation and Proclamation Mediated by Devised Biblical Drama

<sup>29</sup> For further on the double or split nature of drama, see chapter seven.

Proclamation, through drama becomes a manifestation that makes present what it remembers and enacts. As always, we have to remember that drama, as a mimetic manifestation, is an interpretative creative and productive form, offering its own possible worlds. The drama is-not the first event, no matter what *Michael* wishes to say, but as a symbolic and embodied remembering of Scripture, drama is offered as a re-description that does enable an experiential participation in its proposed world. Within the double nature of dramatization, the here-and-now of the men's own context is in close juxtaposition with that of the there-and-then of the fictional story, readily seen within the ways in which they portrayed the different scenes of *The Lost Boy* as recognizable contexts within their own life experiences.

The proclamation/manifestation of the drama of *The Lost Boy* is not identical to Jesus' fictional parable, for it offers the traditional dramatization as it has developed in Gambella. At some point in time interpretative decisions had been made that led to this particular dramatization that has since, by gaining its place as tradition been deemed as in tune with both Scripture and their own lives, and so for this community the drama forms an authentic proclamation of the Gospel. Through the drama the parable has been given an introductory scene that shows the relationships between the characters that provides additional explanation for the younger son's eagerness to leave home to seek independence, offering the theme of broken human relationships that is given resolution within their celebratory additions to the final scene. Through this, somewhat paradoxically in view of the characteristic nature of the proclaimed word as taught, they have turned the open nature of the proclaimed parable into the didactic example of their manifest drama.

### 10.3 Proclamation of Hope made Manifest

Having introduced the relationship between proclamation and manifestation, I examine the thread of proclamation. This thesis has been built upon a perception of Scripture as an offering of memory that presents a beckoning-call as an invitation to engage in possible worlds that draw its 'readers' towards transformed ways of living. This can be seen as in accord with Moltmann's 'theology of hope' and developed by Ricoeur in his essay '*Freedom in the Light of Hope*', where he writes of being 'won over' by Moltmann's work.<sup>30</sup> Through his reading of Scripture, and reflection on the promise of the Resurrection for all creation in spite of and because of the Crucifixion with its outpouring of the sacrificial love of God, Moltmann proposes that a life-transforming eschatological hope should be the ground of theological thinking and so of Christian proclamation:

[E]schatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of the Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day.<sup>31</sup>

This anticipatory hope of being at the cusp of a new beginning is founded on the God of promise, as presented within the Old Testament and confirmed through the Resurrection-promise of the New Testament, for Moltmann claims that such promise offers 'something new' that within the world of our experience 'we cannot think out and picture

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<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur, '*Freedom in Light of Hope*', p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 16.

for ourselves'.<sup>32</sup> In this perception, God and his promises are firmly temporal, with the forward thrust to the future, that Ricoeur insists 'engenders a history'.<sup>33</sup> The proclamation of Scripture enables humanity to hear its repetition of promises and events of partial fulfilment as confirmatory pledges of the ultimate 'surplus' and 'not yet' nature of the promise, and so as a place where, Moltmann proposes that 'the hidden future already *announces* itself and exerts its influence on the present through the hope it awakes'.<sup>34</sup> Thus, appropriated proclamation effects the way that we live toward our future.

For Moltmann, the promise of eschatological hope proclaimed within past, present and future history is rooted in a contradiction between the experience of life-as-it-is and the radical possibilities of new life-as-it-could-be and as-it-is-promised. The hope engendered by the promise of the Resurrection in the light of the Crucifixion means both 'consolation *in* suffering' and also the 'protest of the divine promise *against* suffering'.<sup>35</sup> Moltmann proposes that when humans accept and are inspired by this hope they will no longer be 'reconciled' with reality as-it-is, for 'in the promises, the hidden future already announces itself and exerts its influence on the present in the hope it awakens'.<sup>36</sup> The proclamation of Scripture offers possibilities that feed the imagination. Ricoeur writes of hope as 'allied with the imagination in so far as the latter is the power of the possible and the disposition for being in a radical renewal'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, hope beckons individual Christians and the Church to transformed ways of living, that as yet can only ever move toward 'provisional' and 'penultimate' accord with what is promised, in that the Christian hope in the triune God

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<sup>32</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 16. See also, Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 2004), p. ix-x.

<sup>33</sup> Ricoeur, 'Freedom in Light of Hope', p. 158.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid; Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Moltmann (his emphasis), *Theology of Hope*, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp. 18, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ricoeur, 'Freedom in Light of Hope', p. 161.

will always offer a kingdom of God of an abundant more.<sup>38</sup> Moltmann maintains that whenever and wherever ‘Christianity embraces its true nature’ to be a people of the anticipatory promise, the Church will form ‘a constant disturbance in human society [...] the source of continual new impulses towards the realization of righteousness, freedom and humanity’.<sup>39</sup> This is a theology of possibility ‘in which we can serve the future’, for Moltmann insists that the ‘world is not yet finished, but is understood as engaged in a history’ where ‘hope brings all things into the light of the promises of God’.<sup>40</sup>

This contrast between ‘now’ and an anticipated future hope can be seen writ large within the drama of the *Lost Boy*, while through the dramatic form the proclamation of the parable has been made manifest within the materiality of the present. The first three scenes offered differing depictions of ‘now’, as flawed, to contrast with its final scene of joyful resolution. This returned to the scene of the home, but though the situation was the same, in fact everything was different through the transformation that took place within the drama’s narrative. It formed a picture of beckoning hope to what-could-be in contrast to the what-is of the first three scenes.

Each of these three scenes used a mixture of iconic seemingly changeless ways-of-being that yet also built the narrative through dialectical/dialogical performance of tensions, conflict and development, showing life as a sequence of cause and effect rather than a stabilized status quo.<sup>41</sup> Alone, and in relationship with each other, these scenes presented a dialogue of voices within the frame of the whole drama, both through its depiction of the parable and within the relationship to their own context. The act-scheme of

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<sup>38</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp. 32, 338.

<sup>41</sup> For iconic and dialectical performance, see Figure 8.7, p. 277.



each scene presented and developed an act-image of the activity that is recounted within the parable so that through the enactment the biblical text was interpreted, so offering its own version of the inner-life and possible world held within the scriptural text.<sup>42</sup> Within the drama the world-of-the-narrative meets and mixes with the world-of-the-deviser/actors and their audience. The scenes depicted situational contexts within the knowledge and experience of those who devised and watched the drama, so also offering (whether or not consciously) perspectives on them. Together, these offered the act-possibilities that beckoned toward the enacted hope of the final scene. All three locations were presented with a comic humour that emphasised the human frailties and absurdities inherent within each scenario.

The first scene was of the familial relationships of home, depicted through father, brothers and servants. *Michael* had insisted that the drama showed the father of the parable offering the love that allows total freedom:

They will see a very nice picture of steadfast love that the Father gives to his son.

[...] Before the father gave the money to his son, he did not ask the son, 'Why are you going?' [...] He just give a very big heart and love. It is a very lasting love.

This perception is in line with that of scholarly commentators.<sup>43</sup> However, within the drama, I found it hard to see the father in this light, for he was not presented with any of the warmth of the 'steadfast love' of *Michael's* word image, showing no emotion at either

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<sup>42</sup> For the dynamic of act-scheme, act-image, act-inner-life and act-possibility, see Figure 7.1, p. 235.

<sup>43</sup> Bailey insists this is a loving action 'beyond what is experienced and expected of any earthly father' in the face of the 'extraordinary insult' of the son's demand that is tantamount to wishing for his father's death, *Poet and Peasant*, pp. 158, 161; Isaak, 'Luke', p. 1236; Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 128.

the younger son's demand of his share of the property or at his leaving home. Instead, through their comedy they painted a static picture of an uninvolved potentate of a mini-empire.

In dramatizing the opening part of the story, the men had to make choices that would indicate causes for what in the scriptural narrative forms an introductory state of affairs. In their iconic rather than nuanced depiction of the father as a man of importance and of the family background from which the son wished to escape, the men were left with a paradoxical portrayal of the man that they wished to show as a picture of the 'steadfast love' of God as father. However, the drama also presents a picture of human society, for as scholarship generally insists, parables are resonating stories of everyday life rather than allegories.<sup>44</sup> In this light, the drama intimated that life even within the order of a family household is unstable, for the complexities of human relationships and the self-seeking gratification of individuals undermine the loving order and stability that family may provide, and I suggest through its resonance, that the frail earthly family of the Church seeks, but so often fails, to offer.

The second scene provided a contrast from the ordered, if unhappy situation of the first, offering a dissolute world where temptation lurks at every corner.<sup>45</sup> There was no order or stability, for it offered an image of the disorder and chaos that ensues in a context where there is no father and no family, and where each individual lives for himself alone, as was displayed even when the inhabitants ganged together to gain what they desired, shown for instance, through the barman who hung around to get the final pickings off the

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, see Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, p. 158; Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 128.

<sup>45</sup> Isaak proposes a similar setting, 'Luke', p. 1235.

boy. It was into this world that the boy of the drama was catapulted when he took his inheritance and chose to leave his father's home.

The parable's brief description of the son as one who 'squandered his money in dissolute living' was elaborated and given nuance by the men's sympathetic depiction of the lost boy of the drama as foolish and naive.<sup>46</sup> This dramatization of the lost boy's character is an imaginative interpretation that, in terms of following a Ricoeurian pathway 'toward the orient of the text', can be found within the possibilities presented within the textual clues.<sup>47</sup> The 'boy' was portrayed as a weak rather than a bad individual, who was too self-seeking to live within his own home and yet not sharp enough to the ways of other self-seeking individuals to be able to survive in this 'far country' to which he had travelled. He was depicted as more sinned against than sinning and an easy prey to the temptations of the 'far country' and its unscrupulous inhabitants for whom he was a ready victim. It offers a view of human nature as fallible rather than innately evil. In discussion, *Michael* had made excuses for the lost boy in accord with the way in which this scene was depicted within their drama: 'The son, the prodigal who waste his money, it is not he himself who waste his money. You see, they are always there, they take away his money.' This 'lost boy' is portrayed as an 'everyman' who succumbs to temptation, for as *Simon Ker Liah* had insisted, 'Temptation effect all of us.' The human propensity to succumb to temptation often prefers to justify its failings as ones caused primarily by others or by their situation.

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<sup>46</sup> Bailey similarly insists that the boy's behaviour was 'extravagant' rather than 'immoral', *Poet and Peasant*, p. 170.

<sup>47</sup> For instance, see Paul Ricoeur, 'Appropriation', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 182-193 (p. 186).

For the teetotal group of church leaders and their congregations the drama provided opportunity to explore the parable within their own context of the temptations of modern urban life, symbolized by the bar and its flowing alcohol. Their drama and discussion suggest a perspective of the world of humanity as one that is separated from the world of God, and where the Church is made up of those who seek to perform the difficult task of living within the world, but also within the kingdom of God and according to his norms and values. In this view, the human world with all its temptations offers its unwholesome delights as it waits to ensnare into sin those who are weak enough to stray away from the orbit of the Church and the kingdom of God. The parable, with its message of forgiveness and possibility of return to God's love is crucial when the Christian life is seen in this light, as *Luk Galla Ochalla* explained:

After he [the lost boy] went and he has spend his money there with the bad condition, after he come back, his father again accepted him. And we told the members of the church in order to let them understand that if you are Christian and you fall in temptation and you leave the way of Christianity life and you join another or you went to somewhere totally [different]. If you leave and you come back again, [...] God will accept you and will not reject you.

For *Luk*, though the world with its way of life tempts humanity and should be rejected, God in his love waits for that turning back to him. The men's perception of God, the world and sin act as a framework for their portrayal of this 'distant country', and it is within the frame of this world-view that the audience and actors' delight in this scene must be seen. As in the dramatization of Herod and the slaughter of the innocents in the

Christmas drama, it was this scene of wild behaviour within the dramatization of *The Lost Boy* that was vibrant with life and was relished by the audience as much as by its actors.

The third scene moved to a rural situation, and within the textual parable can be interpreted as providing an environment where the lost boy gains the space and time in which to grow and develop inwardly, realise his need, and so come to his senses ('he came to himself', verse 17) in that he chooses to return home. The comic dramatization depicted the boy's intense need, but less of his growth, except that he had been forced to fend for himself. Rather than 'coming to himself' he had once more been cut adrift by his circumstances, and his need increased through his sojourn in yet another land where he was treated as a stranger of no worth. Family life, urban life and pastoral life were depicted within the drama's first three scenes as ways of life offering little stability or well-being, each due to its own differing tensions and difficulties.

It was the task of the resolution of the final scene to proclaim an alternative view of hope of what life could be like, and will be like, eschatologically speaking. In the light of this change of focus from the gentle disapproval of a comic what-is to one of hope, this scene was played without any of the comedy that had underpinned each of the other scenes. In contrast to the hierarchical control and dis-ease of the first scene, the drama ended with an iconic representation of the festivity and well-being of fellowship within a close-knit community. The applause at its end was of satisfaction that all had been made well. The dramatization of the parable had turned the self-reflexive nature of the textual parable into a didactic one, offering a picture of what will happen when the elder son makes the correct choice to follow his father into the celebratory party. While the embrace of the father for the younger son had begun to answer the need of this one individual, it

was only in the entrance into the party of the elder son and in the brothers' embrace that resolution was complete. Only in the healing of the relationships of the whole family was the lost boy found, or more accurately, were the lost boys truly found.

For the churches of Gambella this is the only possible ending of the drama. This was explained by *Michael*:

You imagine the history. When the father talk to the elder [son] we believe that they come together, all the family, the boys and the neighbours and the servants and the father. The whole family, they come together and they started to unite.

Within the perception of this proclamation-made-manifest of the dramatized parable, forgiveness for the past and present, and reconciliation in the present and future form the dual key to this sense of well-being and its beckoning hope. Together, forgiveness and reconciliation lead to a celebration where both *Michael's* comment and the dramatization portray servants and neighbours participating on equal terms with the inner family group. The inactivity of the uninvolved father and demanding master of the first scene is transformed within the resolution of the drama, as the householder (with his stick of authority still in his hand) dances with his servants at the side of his sons. The drama ends with this celebration, offering its perception of communal life as-it-should-be, as a picture of God and his kingdom in contrast to the faulty household that had torn apart the family of the first scene. In my reading of the first scene as a picture of a less than perfect Church-as-it-is, this final scene depicts it in terms of the household of God on earth to which we are called within the Church-as-it-should-be, as an image of the hope of the eschatological banquet of the kingdom of heaven. The proclamation of the fellowship of inclusivity lived

within the joy of the Father acts a beckoning-call to live likewise, here-and-now toward the future – and within the dramatic form, it had been made manifest in this separated space and time within the here-and-now of this community.

#### **10.4 Manifestation as a Sacramental Presence**

The drama proclaimed the Gospel message of the parable, but it was more than a didactic message, for as an embodiment of the parable in the midst of the community the proclamation was manifest and was affectively experienced. The comic humour that formed the first three scenes can be seen in this light as a mark of its manifestation, for through adding greatly to the enjoyment of both audience and the drama's devising actors, it also drew the audience into the engaged participation in the drama that helps turn proclamation into manifestation.

The second scene of the drama in particular drew everyone present into the communal world that was being shared. There was a sense of delighted-shock, particularly amongst the children at the depiction of behaviour within this scene, and it was perhaps made all the more enjoyable for all because it was their church leaders who were giving this display of what, according to the Christian norms within these communities, was outrageous behaviour. For the actors, there was a carnivalesque relish in the opportunity to play at 'being bad' and to show off in front of others. Sanctioning an inversion of behavioural norms, carnival, as has already been discussed, 'celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order'.<sup>48</sup> Carnival freedom offers shadow-sides of behaviour and personality a hearing within the security of an

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<sup>48</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 10. For a brief description of 'carnival', see Eric Weitz, *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 186-188.

interlude of an ‘as if’ situation that is outside the bounds of present reality. By exaggerating, ridiculing and laughing at the temptations offered by dissolute living, they were no longer seen as a tragic universal human condition from which there was no escape. Cut down to size, though temptation still lays in wait to trip up the best as well as the worst ‘everyman’, as it is laughed at, its stranglehold is cut loose and the ‘very big heart and love’ of God, as described by *Michael* is ready and waiting for the sinner to turn away so that he may return to the household of God.

Moltmann suggests that it is through the ‘suspended state of playing’, as paralleled within the mimetic nature of drama, that ‘anti-environments’ and ‘counter-environments’ are constructed as ‘conscious confrontation’ that may then open up the worlds of possibility of ‘creative freedom and future alternatives’.<sup>49</sup> If the first three scenes of *The Lost Boy* are portrayed as anti-environments in both Jesus’ parable as well as through the affectivity of the embodied comedy of the men’s dramatization, then the final scene of the drama offers the experienced joy of the counter-environment to which those who engage in it through play may then aspire to in reality. Moltmann places this in temporal terms: ‘We are then no longer playing with the past in order to escape it for a while, but we are increasingly playing with the future in order to get to know it [...]’.<sup>50</sup> The play with the future had begun within the laughter of the first three scenes that pricked the solemn bubble of life-as-it-is, for it no longer held its power as an immutable status quo.

The final scene constructed a counter-environment as an invitation into life as it could be. *Michael* considered the transforming effect for the actors of the experience of

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<sup>49</sup> Moltmann uses terms from M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (New York, 1964), *Theology and Joy*, p. 36.

<sup>50</sup> Moltmann, *Theology and Joy*, p. 36.



being a part of the final dance of the drama as one of participation, ‘When we dance with our brother, and when we make the picture we will bring it again. We ourselves will come and see it.’ The eschatological moment had been made present in the midst of the community. *The Lost Boy* ended with a representation of the festivity of fellowship that was experienced by both audience and actors as a participation in *communitas*, the feeling of close belonging or togetherness, where audiences and actors, according to Jill Dolan may ‘feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way’.<sup>51</sup> In terms of devised biblical drama in general, and *The Lost Boy* in particular, I suggest that one can omit Dolan’s ‘nearly’ from her claim. The drama ended in dancing, forming a picture that is redolent of iconic performance. It offered a moment of Dolan’s performative utopias of eschatological hope, and as an instance of Marvin Carlson’s description of an ‘epiphanic’ moment of the ‘stillness of infinity’.<sup>52</sup> As the drama of *The Lost Boy* ended, the kingdom of God was present *now* in Gambella, within the ephemerality of the fleeting moment of an event.

Drama is a performative medium, and Dolan, as already discussed (chapter seven) writes of the performative utopias of dramatic performance that allow their recipients an anticipatory experience that ‘makes palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better’ where, and she quotes Ricoeur, ‘the field of the possible is [...] opened beyond the actual’.<sup>53</sup> In their shared passion for the possible, Ricoeur’s hermeneutical search for meaning through explanation is reliant on wagers of understanding that only take place

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<sup>51</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Marvin A. Carlson, ‘The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive’, *Theatre Journal*, 55.1 (2003), 207-211 (p. 211).

<sup>53</sup> Dolan, p. 5; Paul Ricoeur, ‘Ideology and Utopia’, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, 2, trans. and ed. by Kathleen Blamey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 308-324 (p. 320).

through imaginative ‘inhabitation’ of ‘proposed worlds’ *now* which, like Dolan’s performative utopias offer a foretaste of future possibility and so beckon through their imaginative experience into the future through their appropriation. Dolan’s utopian performatives therefore, are in Christian terms experienced, ‘sacramental’ anticipations within a time of inaugurated, but not yet realized eschatology, as the kingdom of God that draws humanity towards the possibilities within a this-worldly nature. Such a view of eschatology bears reminiscence with that presented within Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* which is hardly surprising since he, Ricoeur, and Dolan share their ‘passion for the possible’.

Anticipatory hope has its basis in the God who works within and through historical time, rather than in its negation, and it is this that must effect what I mean when I write of ‘making present’ and ‘sacramentality’ within this present preliminary exploration. Moltmann compares Christian understandings of God as ‘eternally present’ with what he insists is a more authentic scripturally based understanding of the future-oriented ‘God of hope’.<sup>54</sup> He considers that Christian perceptions of God as ‘eternally present’ have been ‘deeply’ influenced by ‘the god of Parmenides’ of Greek philosophical thought, who is a being that ‘never was, never will be, for now it is all at once as a whole’.<sup>55</sup> This perception of God is of immanent presence whereby eternity is gained by ‘bringing time to a standstill’ and being fully immersed within the sacramentality of the present moment.<sup>56</sup> Moltmann offers Søren Kierkegaard’s description of this as the paradox whereby ‘the believer turns his back on the eternal [...], precisely in order to have it by him in the one

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<sup>54</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 26-32. See also, Ricoeur, ‘Freedom in Light of Hope’, pp. 158-161.

<sup>55</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

day that is today'. Kierkegaard concludes: 'The Christian believes, and thus he is quit of tomorrow.'<sup>57</sup>

Moltmann insists on the incompatibility of this perception of God as 'eternal presence' with the God of the proclamation of Scripture who, as in the Crucifixion and Resurrection works within and through history. This God of Scripture, he proposes is 'present in promising the future', of himself, of humanity and the world, and who beckons humanity 'into the history that is not yet':

'The 'now' and 'today' of the New Testament is a different thing from the 'now' of the eternal presence of being in Parmenides, for it is a 'now' and an 'all of a sudden' in which the newness of the promised future is lit up and seen in a flash [...], an 'eschatological' today.'<sup>58</sup>

In this perception, the promise of the nearness and presence of God is less within an arrested moment of infinity, than it is within a beckoning-call to follow the pathway toward the coming and future kingdom of God. Moltmann is cautious of the very idea of sacramental presence, proposing a waiting expectancy 'at the Table' rather than 'possession of the sacred present of the Absolute'.<sup>59</sup> Yet, his use of language in the above quotation, of a "now" and an "all of a sudden", and of the promised future 'lit up and seen in a flash' is evocative of sacramental experience. In a later work, Moltmann writes of 'living in the presence of the risen Christ, and stretching out to the coming kingdom of

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<sup>57</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* (chapter 3), as quoted by Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 29.

<sup>58</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 326.

God', and of Christ 'coming to meet us out of the future'.<sup>60</sup> It seems that we can only live in the presence of Christ if we are following the pathway from the expectancy of remembrance toward the future hope. Developing Moltmann's arguments, I suggest that sacramentality, distinct from being a manifestation of the a-historical and other-worldly 'eternal presence', has to be seen as a re-membering of a proclamatory, anticipatory, and missional presence with a beckoning-call to embrace this-worldly ways of living hopefully toward the future.

Bernard Beckerman's description of iconic performance carries similarities with Moltmann's description of the 'eternally present', for it too seeks to capture and hold the moment in a state of inertia that could be perceived as the 'stillness of infinity' that Carlson describes as experienced within the theatre as 'moments of such intensity that they might be called epiphanies'. Yet, for Carlson, theatre only produces such moments because they oscillate with the 'fleeting present'.<sup>61</sup> It is only in accepting that this is an ephemeral moment that cannot be held, but must be experienced and carried forward to the future within the dialectic/dialogue of time that the iconic can become a force for a beckoning hope rather than a container of an unchanging status quo. Through such iconic and epiphanic 'sacramental' moments of 'manifestation', the relentless movement and the tensions of cause and effect may be given clarity, meaning and purpose, as within the final moments of the drama of *The Lost Boy*.

## 10.5 Conclusion

I have considered devised biblical drama through Ricoeur's differentiation between proclamation and manifestation as mediation between them. I have demonstrated that the

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<sup>60</sup> Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>61</sup> Carlson, 'Theatre Journal Auto Archive', p. 211.

drama of *The Lost Boy* acts as a proclamation of the Gospel that is made manifest through its presentation of the parable, in that it told the narrative through the doing and showing of the embodied form, so interpreting it within the contextual situation of Gambella according to their perceived needs. I suggested that it was also in accord with Moltmann's eschatological approach to theology within its scenes of life as-it-is contrasted with the hope of the kingdom of God as presented through its final scene. As an embodied and mimetic, symbolic form, devised biblical drama intrinsically makes its interpretation of Scripture manifest within its present context, with laughter and play acting as a means of critical, participative engagement. Consideration of manifestation as sacramentality focuses on the ways in which God and his kingdom are encountered as 'presence' within the present. Moltmann's eschatology proposes that rather than a static 'eternal presence', God is encountered within a draw to an eschatological future. This can be demonstrated through the last scene of *The Lost Boy* that not only proclaimed the Gospel within an embodied dramatized manifestation, but became an experienced participation in the kingdom within its ephemeral sense of *communitas*, described in secular terms as Dolan's utopian performatives. Thus, I suggest that *The Lost Boy* acts not only as proclamation made manifest, but also as a more sacramental manifestation, that yet remains proclamation.

This chapter has used the work of Moltmann to extend Ricoeur's work on manifestation and proclamation, enabling an investigation of biblical drama, through the illustration of *The Lost Boy* as a manifest proclamation of Scripture that may also be a participative sacramental manifestation of God and his kingdom. This final part of the thesis has considered the present practice of drama in Gambella and its developing sedimentary tradition that is focused more on a participative engagement in its cultural

memory than in developing a practice of devising as a means of scriptural interpretation, the consideration of the previous part of the thesis. What remains is to look back at the path travelled; drawing these two sections together in order to seek the general rather than the particular, of what devised biblical drama as a means of interpretation may have to offer the Church.



## Conclusion

### An Enabling Tool of Biblical Interpretation:

#### Inhabiting Possible Worlds through Devised Drama

To show drama is very good for us. We gain something. It is not because we are just playing, we live it. We are just thinks what we are going to do. We practice it. We have the experience. [...] I put it into my mind and into my heart again. I am just waiting to live it now. (Peter Kuel Lul)<sup>1</sup>

This research has developed out of reflection on my experience within the Anglican churches of Gambella, forming an illustration of problems faced by such orally focused communities in engaging with Scripture. It has also developed out of my sense of unease that the first phase of the recent *Bible in the Life of the Church* project of the Anglican Communion, within its concern for the biblical engagement of ordinary Anglicans, had left the significant minority of its orally focused communities as a forgotten margin. Through fieldwork investigations in juxtaposition with theoretical engagement, this thesis has proposed and demonstrated devised biblical drama as a liberative alternative hermeneutic, to enable such churches to accept the ‘invitation’ of Scripture to ‘enter’ and ‘inhabit’ its ‘proposed worlds’, so giving birth to understandings and appropriations of the proposed worlds of Scripture: ‘What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities’.<sup>2</sup> *Peter’s* reflections (above) on his experience of drama during our fieldwork project, attests to the potentiality of the serious-fun of this playful approach, that was far more than ‘play’ in that it allowed him to

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<sup>1</sup> Morning Prayer Drama, Final Monday, December 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation’, in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 73-118 (p. 102).



‘live’, and so ‘inhabit’ Scripture experientially through its re-presentation as drama, which in its turn drew him toward renewed ways of living within his everyday actuality.

This investigation has been concerned with both enhancing orally focused Christian engagement with Scripture, and also to understand and value the gifts that such local church communities may have to offer the wider church.<sup>3</sup> This conclusion draws together the findings of the research journey. I had begun the research seeking an enabling tool for making fresh biblical interpretation within local churches. Yet, my experience of fieldwork in Gambella, together with my concern to both listen to and give voice to my fieldwork participants has broadened my conception of the interpretative process and biblical engagement to include the sedimentary dramas of repeated tradition. Bringing the operant and espoused voices of the practical illustration from the Anglican Churches of Gambella into conversation with both the Church’s normative confessional perception of Scripture as ‘the word of the Lord’, and with the theoretical (formal) Ricoeurian account of Scripture as a particular and unique instance of the mimetic nature of the dynamic relationship of time, telling and tradition, I have reflected on what devised biblical drama, as a way of ‘reading’ Scripture through the doing of enactment, has to offer orally focused churches. Within this conclusion I re-visit the landmarks on the path of the research journey, considering, firstly, the drama that was freshly devised within the fieldwork, and secondly, the present developing tradition of practice within these churches, and of its wider possibilities. From this experience and example of an orally focused church I suggest the research’s wider resonance in order to propose the value of drama as an imaginative means of engagement with Scripture for the wider Church.

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<sup>3</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro describes these two aims in terms of ‘liberation’ and ‘justice’, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 8, 11.

### 11.1 Drama: a Ricoeurian Hermeneutical Approach for Orally Focused Churches

Ricoeurian hermeneutics of ‘telling’ have formed a basis for this work, offering insight into the nature of interpretation as it relates to both Scripture and devised biblical drama. Ricoeur’s perception of ‘telling’ is of a dynamic of remembering the past for the present, so that it offers, through its proposed worlds, a beckoning and anticipatory call to the future. This, in accord with Moltmann’s eschatological theology of hope, may be seen to offer itself as an apt description of the foundational and formative promissory nature of Scripture for the Church.<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur’s insistence on the symbolic, referential nature of such telling through mimesis, proposes interpretation as inherently creative, and so involving in addition to the analytical task of ‘explanation’, the imaginative work of ‘understanding’, in order to tell the past and discern the possibilities within its proposed worlds. Through its necessarily creative and imaginative nature, interpretative telling is characterized by intrinsic multivalence that has effect within any new contextual situation of the re-description of telling. In its turn this leads to a perception of the revelation of Scripture as not only a work of the Holy Spirit, but through partnership with the discerning interpretative work of humanity itself. Further, revelation can be seen as not only forming Scripture, but also as a continuing activity within past, present and future ‘reading’ of Scripture. In elaboration of Rowan Williams’ insistence that ‘God speaks in the response as in the primary utterance’, I would add, in accord with both Williams and Ricoeur, that God indeed continues to speak through the imagination and the heart as well as the cerebral concept.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: on the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Trinity and Revelation’, in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 131-147 (p. 147); Paul Ricoeur, ‘Manifestation and Proclamation’, in *Figuring*

Ricoeur is a critical philosopher of hermeneutics and nowhere discusses the particular issue of ‘telling’ for orally focused communities. Through my illustration from Gambella, I have brought a consideration of devised biblical drama, within the specific circumstances of orally focused local church communities, into conversation with Ricoeur’s hermeneutical understanding of an interpretative arc, where he proposes that deepening engagement develops through a dynamic relationship of explanation, understanding and appropriation. Working from pre-understandings, assumptions and naïve understanding devised biblical drama seeks a closer engagement with the text, not that it may be discussed in conceptual terms, but rather in order that it may be dramatized in physical terms. This work of interpretation, re-telling and dramatization all takes place through an oscillation between explanation and understanding. Firstly, I have proposed that Ricoeur’s assumption of an explanatory critical analysis of the text itself may be approached within a conversational biblical interpretation that is aided by its search for clues that lead to a re-telling of a scriptural passage in embodied terms. I have suggested these clues may be gained through ‘ordinary’ questions open to anyone, such as: ‘Who? What? How? Why?’ and which are implicit within the very activity of devising drama. This part of the process is described by *Peter*, in the quotation with which I opened this chapter as, ‘We are just thinks about what we are going to do.’

Secondly, the other side of the dynamic is of understanding, formed from experimental and developing wagers of interpretation within the oscillating and imaginative inter-relationship between the world-of-the-text and the world-of-the-‘reader’ that forms the world-in-front-of-the-text. Within the orally focused world of devised

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*the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. by Mark I. Wallace, trans. by David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 48-67 (p. 67).

biblical drama, practical re-presentational playing with such wagers is what forms appropriation of understanding within the experimental action of the enacted narrative of the drama. This was described by *Peter* as more than ‘just playing, we live it [...]’. We practice it, we have the experience.’ Understanding gained through dramatization is sensed and experienced as well as imagined and thought about. Such appropriated understanding within a performed drama can be described as a ‘standing-under’ the text, and more distinctively, through an embodied ‘standing-within’ the text of Scripture that has been rendered in physical actualized form.

This dramatized experimental appropriation offers potential effect on life itself. For Ricoeur, explanation and understanding necessarily leads to appropriation within life, for otherwise the ‘telling’ has lost its beckoning-call into the future. For *Peter*, the experience of the dramatic engagement has enabled him to ‘put it into my heart and into my mind again’. He is ‘just waiting to live it now’. Within an orally focused rather than the critically focused world of literacy, devised biblical drama is not reliant on interpretative elucidation of conceptual meaning before it may be appropriated within life, but rather on an experienced affectivity that may in more holistic ways lead to reflective engagement and to formed and transformed Christian lives.

Devising drama offers a particularly collaborative and contextualized approach to Ricoeurian ‘telling’ that is, like all telling creative and mimetic, but is distinct in that it is formed and shown through physical representation and embodiment by those who both devise and act the re-descriptions of its configurations. Through this, both the activity of devising and the event of the drama do and show proposed worlds of telling, building from the enacted activity of an act-scheme that offers its re-presentational act-image and act-

inner-life to the proposed worlds of act-possibility. As with any interpretation of Scripture, devised biblical drama offers the proposed worlds of its re-description that though founded upon Scripture itself, have become a new form offering its clarifications and extensions within its proposed worlds of the appropriation of 'this interpretation'. With Ricoeur, I have demonstrated that though this can be seen as a productive and creative offering of 'more' than its original stimulus, within its framing of bringing certain aspects into close focus, other aspects are left in the shadow, so offering in other respects a 'less' than its origin. In brief, and as with any interpretation, drama as a 'reading' offers the proposed worlds of itself rather than the full range of possible worlds carried within Scripture.

Through embodiment, drama offers a somatic as well as imaginative experience, so enabling a physical as well as imaginative affectivity and effectivity, experimentation and engagement with its proposed worlds. Drama's mimetic actualized reality, within a close juxtaposition with its actual reality, offers its liminality. Being neither quite one thing nor another, its 'betwixt and between' worlds enable performative manifestation of Scripture as well as its proclamation. This performative liminality, where the remembrance of the past and the anticipation of the future meet in their actualized form, offers the actuality of a Benjaminian messianic present, described by Jill Dolan as 'utopian performatives', but that within Christian terms may perhaps be better described as potentially sacramental in nature. This is an intimation that calls for further research that is beyond the reach of this more general consideration of the process and nature of devised biblical drama that seeks what this approach has to offer the interpretation of Scripture and its role in Christian formation for the local orally focused church.

All the men talked of drama as an ‘easy’ way to engage with Scripture. *Michael Anyar Garang*, without any of *Peter’s* elaboration described what they had done as ‘play’: ‘You can read the Bible like what we did. We just take the passage, the chapter that is Morning Prayer and we can play. We play!’ *Michael* has noted the fun and accessibility of drama, but not the fact that it is the play that has enabled him to make his critical engagement. With the aid of Bakhtin, I have proposed that the fun and laughter of drama enables people to stand outside an issue and so look at it from a fresh perspective.<sup>6</sup> Devising drama, therefore offers itself as an accessible approach to Scripture that is not specifically reliant on prior knowledge and understanding, or on facilitation by either theological or theatrical educators. It is reliant on a willingness to engage communally, in practical and playful, serious and fun terms with the text, one’s own world and one’s whole self.

### **11.2 The Developing Anglican Tradition of Devised Biblical Drama in Gambella**

My presuppositions behind the thesis had been developed upon devised drama as an approach to fresh interpretation of passages from Scripture, rather in the nature of a practical and embodied Bible-study. However, my fieldwork presented the additional scenario of biblical dramas that were not devised around a fresh interpretation of Scripture but that were re-presented as a following of a tradition. Consequently, and using Ricoeurian terminology, and his view of the oscillating nature of tradition, this thesis has investigated and found a basis in the foundational and formative potentialities of dramas of the sedimentary tradition as well as of the potentialities offered by a tradition that is willing to incorporate innovation.

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<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 10.

The Anglican churches of Gambella are developing traditions of biblical drama that build upon the established tradition of the Christmas dramas. The Anuak Anglicans have devised 'special' drama to present a few chosen passages from Scripture that they perceive as offering the 'full message' of the Gospel. These are primarily didactic in intent, but are also perceived in more performative effectual and affectual terms. Rather than developing a proclamatory story-telling dramatization such as that of the Anuaks, the Nuer Anglicans have devised liturgical celebrations for Holy Week and Easter that incorporate dramatization. Liturgical drama draws an audience into active performative involvement in the re-telling of Scripture through its embodied re-presentation within the worshipping community. In terms of Avery Dulles' models of Church, the Anuak dramas may be seen as of more heraldic intent, though with the Nuer liturgical dramas also speak of a concern for mystical communion.<sup>7</sup>

Both these developments of traditions of drama can be seen as encouraging a participative appropriation of these tellings of the Christian tradition as foundational and formative for life. In terms of Jan Assmann's account of the characteristics of cultural memory, drama that has become traditional has formed a layer of sediment of 'concretion' that both fixes and forms Christian identity with its norms, values and 'obligations' through the 'reconstructed' nature of its particular 'form' for its own specific context.<sup>8</sup> Through forming embodied actualized participation, and so inhabitation, within its foundational Scripture the dramas and dramatized liturgy offer actual beckoning calls to follow their proposed pathways into the future.

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<sup>7</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', trans. by John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (1995), 125-133 (p. 126).

Through dramatization, Scripture is taken out of its textual form to be re-told within an actualized embodied form, making manifest the remembrance and promise of the proclaimed good news of Scripture performed by and in the midst of the community for whom it is foundational and formative. The Anglican church leaders of Gambella consistently described their remembering through drama as a means of bringing the events of yesterday to today. Their conversation was all in terms of Scripture offering an open window onto a literal account of the world-behind-the-text of what had taken place before. Yet, the men's use of 'history' and 'story' as one concept, and their willingness to play with the story within their dramas, was shown both within the fresh interpretations of Luke 7:18-23/24-35, and in their traditional dramas, be it the Christmas drama, the *Temptation of Christ*, Jesus' parable of *The Lost Boy*, or the liturgical midrash of the drama of the Palm Sunday procession, or the Easter Sunday visit to the empty tomb. This suggests a more flexible, nuanced perception than a visit to the world-behind-the-text suggests. Rather, their concern seems focused on making sense of the remembering that is carried within Scripture for their own context. This draws closer to my own Ricoeurian influenced approach to Scripture as the world-of-the-text of beckoning remembrance that leads us to faithful and formative engagement with the world-in-front-of-the-text, drawing us ever within and toward the now-and-not-yet of the kingdom of God.

Through this imaginative and creative engagement with the revelation of Scripture, such incorporative drama offers itself as potentially sacramental in being open to a present revelatory communication of God and his kingdom. This experience of 'now' offers itself as a foretaste, drawing its participants in expectancy and hope toward living as individuals, and as a community, that accords with moving ever closer toward the eschatological promise of life within the kingdom of God. In doing so, the local community of the church



becomes, in Avery Dulles' terms, more than a 'herald' or a 'mystical communion', for in developing as a 'community of disciples' they and their drama become a 'sacrament' of God's drawing presence for its own particular context.

There is no guaranteed relationship between the use of traditional ways of dramatizing Scripture and the formation of a sacramental community, for dramatization, as with any work of interpretation and its appropriation is a human task as well as a potential conduit of the Holy Spirit and the communicative presence of the triune God. A repeated drama, as with repetitious liturgy may become detached from what has initially given it life, causing its fossilization so that it can no longer speak with living meaning within its developing and ever-changing context. Ricoeur's call is for ideology with its rooting in the past and utopia's draw to the future to continue to speak and beckon toward the freedom of humanity, so demanding a continuing spirit of discernment that rather than blindly accepting, ever looks with fresh eyes at the relationship between text, interpretation and life itself (the world-of-the-text, the world-of-the-drama and the world-of-the-'readers'/devisers/actors/audience). In terms of Christians 'reading' Scripture through drama, discernment is in relationship to perceptions of the triune God and the ways of his kingdom.

These developing traditions of drama in Gambella invite inhabitation of their own contextualized doing and showing of the 'tellings' of Scripture, within the understanding carried within the inherited and bequeathed theology of the dramas. As such, they play a foundational and formative role within the life of these Anglican churches. However, they do not elicit the fresh interpretation whereby individuals and church communities continually seek to understand and develop Scripture for themselves within their own

contexts. In a Freirian pedagogical statement, Ched Myers insists that it is not only the ‘right’, but also the ‘duty’ of Christians to ‘struggle’ with interpreting Scripture.<sup>9</sup> The ‘living stones’ of tradition may become fossilized, and it is only in continually looking afresh at Scripture that we may be fully active participants in forming and discerning our own life of faith, and in developing, in relationship with others, our own theological bequests to the life of our Church.

### **11.3 Conclusion: The Potential Gifts of Devised Biblical Drama for the Church**

Within their discussion on choosing drama for performance some of the men had specifically made a call for devising fresh dramas. In their concern to offer their ‘best speech’, perhaps particularly in the light of that unseen audience of ‘*Mary’s* university’ the church leaders took what can be seen as the safe option of re-presenting dramas of their tradition. My introduction of ‘Morning Prayer drama’ had provided the opportunity to redress the balance and provided the church leaders with the experience of using devised drama as a means of fresh scriptural interpretation.

At the end of the fieldwork the church leaders gave their final reflections on our week’s work, several of whom picked up this theme of the fresh possibilities of making ‘new’ drama, as voiced by *Luk Galla Ochalla*: ‘To create new, or to create different dramas [...] is most important now’. *Wilson Okello Akuay*, discovering its value for his own biblical engagement, now looked to its use within his group of churches:

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<sup>9</sup> Ched Myers, ‘Stories to Live By’, in *Mark, Gospel of Action: Personal and Community Responses*, ed. by John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 33-38 (p. 34).

So, I am learning more and more and more on Bible because I am now creating through drama. So it is now very easy for me to make a drama for my centre, very easy. They will understand what I learned about.

For *John Gach Dak*, the realisation was in the potential of drama as an alternative means to engage with the whole of Scripture:

This time it is very clear to me. Every Gospel, every reading, there is drama. [...] Every chapter has got drama. [...] So to me, I understand that all the books, every chapter has drama, not only the reading and the preaching.

Drama presented from a traditional repertoire, and drama as a freshly devised interpretation is less of an either/or than a both/and, for both forms may make their own contribution to the life of the Church, and each may feed the practice of the other. The tradition of drama is a way of inhabiting and passing on the foundational and formative cultural memory of the tradition. In orally focused communities cultural memory is crucial, for engagement with the relatively fixed form of Scripture is severely limited by problems of access. Yet, a tradition of drama, it seems, may act as a barrier against fresh interpretation. However, a community who has such a tradition of drama is in the way of engaging with Scripture dramatically, and so to engage in freshly made dramatized interpretation is asking for a widening of their use of the medium, rather than a totally alien approach. I have proposed that the communal activity of making freshly devised drama enables members of such communities to engage more creatively and speculatively with Scripture in that the dramatic version does not need to be seen as the 'final word' of interpretation, but as a provisional experiment that encourages reflection, so making its

own contribution to engagement and ownership of what is foundational and formative for oneself amongst one's community. In a community that has a tradition of using drama, such experiments of interpretation need not remain as ephemeral experiments. If discerned as offering an account of Scripture and the Christian tradition that rings true for their community, fresh dramas may in their turn join a widening repertoire of what this church, or these churches see as their tradition of performed dramas.

Devised drama may offer a self-sustaining means of scriptural engagement, in that it is not reliant on theological educators, and enables a community to develop their own means of interpretation. The Morning Prayer dramas had been instigated by me, but beyond this they were not facilitated in any way, so only requiring a perception of possibility and a willingness to use devising drama as a tool of interpretation and engagement with Scripture. Questions of normativity within the mainstream of Christian tradition may be asked, but indeed this may be asked of any community who engage in any method of biblical interpretation for themselves. Yet, the very activity of open biblical engagement, where a community makes their own interpretation through the process of devising drama, allows Scripture to speak-for-itself and encourages critical reflection and discernment through the conversational and physical re-description. *Darash Thatha Ojulu* had specified making drama as a means of internalising Scripture:

For me it is learning, I will learn from that drama, it is understanding also,  
especially because *when you are making drama you will retain it*, otherwise it is

not here, you don't know anything, and is learning also - we are putting into imagination.<sup>10</sup>

This is a cumulative engagement, whereby playing with passages from Scripture enable them to become known and retained in, as *Darash* insists, an imaginative form, and I suggest through the memory of the somatic experience, so that they build to form a store for further inter-textual engagement and reflection. Thereby, devising drama becomes a means of developing 'biblical literacy' through a non-literate means.

Having demonstrated that devised drama provides an accessible and enabling means of scriptural engagement within orally focused church communities, as illustrated by my telling-case of the Anglican Churches of Gambella, I also propose that this method of engagement with Scripture could enrich other communities within the wider church. As a holistic approach to Scripture, devising drama offers a broadening of engagement from what is so often contained within cerebral and conceptual approaches to Bible-study in that it demands an imaginative, creative and playful exploration of the text-itself as it has to make its own re-descriptions within an embodied form.

However, the method is reliant on people being able and willing to play, using themselves as the means of representational expression and communication. While the Anglicans of Gambella appear to have no problems in playing in this way, indeed they do so with energy and enthusiasm, I suggest that such an approach would take many English Anglicans well beyond the expectations and comfort zones of their self-consciousness. In

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<sup>10</sup> This same sentiment was expressed as, 'Well, I won't forget that passage again!' when I used Luke 7: 18-35 (as in Morning Prayer drama) in a drama workshop with a group of undergraduates in England.

this, my own context, ‘Let’s pretend!’ is a phase of childhood; drama is a subject for school; and performing drama is generally assumed to be the acting of pre-written scripts by eager amateurs or professionals. I also perceive particular practical problems for the many aging congregations of English Anglican churches. Though I have proposed and demonstrated that devising drama could be an enabling method of biblical interpretation, further work would be needed to adapt methods of devising drama so that they may be offered in a more accessible form for contexts where practical drama would be neither appropriate nor acceptable as a means of engagement.

The fact remains, however, that in the particular context of Gambella people are both willing and eager to engage in devised biblical drama. Furthermore, devised biblical drama could act as a universal means of biblical interpretation in as much as it offers an enabling approach to Scripture. Having particular value for orally focused communities, in that other literary means of engagement with Scripture are not accessible, drama may offer an alternative hermeneutic to any community who is willing to play in this particular way. To such communities, *Michael Anyar Garang* called for a sharing of gifts: ‘We learn from each other’s experience. [...] You come with what you have and we share it together’.

*Michael* was speaking to his fellow church leaders within Gambella, but it has a broader resonance. Archbishop Rowan Williams has affirmed the reading of Scripture ‘in company with believers of every age and place and bringing to bear the [particular] perspectives and skills of their human culture’.<sup>11</sup> The churches of Gambella have demonstrated a particular gift for embodying their interpretations of Scripture within

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<sup>11</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Foreword’, Report of the Anglican Communion “Bible in the Life of the Church” Project, *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery*, ACC-15 (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2012), p. 1

devised biblical drama. This is in accord with John Taylor's earlier description of 'East Africans' having an 'inspired gift for spontaneous, powerful dramatization', and with what Musimbi Kanyoro had noted in the way that the rural orally focused Kenyan women in her project engaged with the book of *Ruth*, 'Never before had I seen women read themselves into the Bible as did this group.'<sup>12</sup>

Archbishop Justin Welby has called for a sharing of ways of approaching Scripture within the Anglican Communion, wondering, 'can their context and perspectives be a gift to mine?'<sup>13</sup> *Michael Anyar Garang*, echoing his hopes and aspirations, called for what had been shared within the fieldwork project to become part of practice. Through *Michael*, I offer the gifts of Gambella within the words of his beckoning call to others within the Church, to whomsoever and wherever it may be applicable:

And when we come together, we learn from each other's experience. [...] And I hope when anyone go to his place he will make drama in a new way because he learn from the other persons how the passage is using drama. [...] No one will be able to leave the drama again, because it is a short [easy?] way that people can explore the Bible together.

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<sup>12</sup> John Taylor, *Were You There? An African Presentation of the Passion Story* (London: Highway Press, 1950[?]), p. 9. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Welby, Anglican Communion, 'The Bible in the Life of the Church Project', in 'Theology, *Mission* <<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/theology/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx>> [accessed 3 December 2015]

## **Appendices**



### **Ethical Approval**

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference HUM 11/ 002 in the Department of Humanities and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 30.11.11.



**ETHICS COMMITTEE  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Drama as a Way of Exploring the Bible**

**Title of Research Project:**

**Playing with Fire: Enabling Participation in the Dialogue of Scripture through the use of Performance within the Community of the Local Church in Rural Africa**

**Brief Description of Research Project**

Mary Witts' research explores what performance of the Bible may offer African churches in rural, orally based contexts (where many people cannot read, and where there are few Bibles).

Mary is exploring how drama (and other performance) can pass on the content of the text, and also how drama can encourage a conversational and creative involvement with the text to bring it from the words on the page into the physical present.

Mary hopes this will encourage communal (and individual) interpretation of meaning that seeks relevance and use within the life of the local church.

Mary's field trip to Ethiopia follows her earlier work with the Anglican churches of the Gambella region.

This visit is to meet and work with a group of people that she has already worked with.

Mary and the participants will investigate more closely the way the churches of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia use and experience the Bible, and in particular how they use drama.

Workshops will be used for study and discussion.

Mary will have closer conversation with each participant, through interviews.

The *Bible in the Life of the Church* project will be used for the group to explore together the possibilities of using drama as a means of interpreting the Bible.

The Anglican Communion's *Bible in the Life of the Church* project is from 2009-2012.

It is exploring how we as Anglicans use the Bible, by sharing our experiences.

They have produced case studies so that churches throughout the Anglican Communion can participate in the project.

The project hopes to be inclusive, to involve local churches as well as scholars.

The case studies will need particular approaches for Anglicans living within communities where many people cannot read.

Mary Witts' research aims to suggest drama may encourage an open, conversational approach to scripture and the Bible study task, for readers and non-readers alike.

**Details of Project**

**When?** Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December – Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011

**Where?** Anglican Centre, Gambella

Meals will be provided, and accommodation and travel costs for those living outside Gambella.

**Who?** 8-12 participants, church leaders, and former tutors

**What?** Workshops, Interviews, Drama

Photographs and sound recordings will be made throughout the project.

**Investigator Contact Details:**

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**Consent Statement:** *(to be filled in at the start of the project)*

I agree to take part in this research.

I understand that I am free to leave the project at any point.

I understand that the information I provide will be used towards Mary Witts' research project.

*(Cross out one of the **following** two statements. Leave the one that you agree with.)*

I am happy for my name and contributions to be used in any publication of Mary Witts' research.

I am not happy for my name to be used. Mary Witts will treat my contributions in confidence, and will give me anonymity in any publication of her research, by giving me another name.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a worry about your participation in the research, or any other questions, please talk with Mary Witts.

But, if you would like to contact an independent party you may contact the Head of Department or the Director of Studies.

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